

March
1995

INTERREGNUM

#11



fantasy roleplaying and more

INTERREGNUM

#11

*An Amateur Press Association
about fantasy roleplaying games
and anything that interests those who play them.*

Peter Maranci, ed.

Topic: "Love"

March 1995

Interregnum is an Amateur Press Association, comprised of zines written by individual contributors and mailed to the editor. It is collated and published approximately twelve times per year. New contributors and subscribers are always welcome.

A subscription normally costs \$2.00 per issue plus the actual cost of the selected method of mailing (see FAQ for more details). Subscribers may open an account from which these costs are deducted by mailing a check or money order in US funds, payable to Peter Maranci, at the following address:

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PUBLICATION SCHEDULE:

⇒ The deadline for inclusion in **Interregnum** #12 is April 15th. Zines for **Interregnum** #13 must arrive by June 1st.

⇒ The topic for **Interregnum** #12 is *Immortality*. See the editorial page for more info.

→Pete

It doesn't seem too early to call the first issue of Interregnnum under the new six-week schedule a clear success. Even though several of the usual suspects didn't get a zine together for this issue (and you *were* missed, guys), Interregnnum #11 is one of the longest issues yet. And this despite the fact that I did considerably less nagging reminding than usual. ☺ Nonetheless I'll continue to post reminders on the Net. After all, who knows? If this trend keeps up, we may soon break the 100-page barrier.

Topic: Immortality

The topic for Interregnnum #12 is *Immortality*. When I first started playing AD&D™, true immortality was the main goal of every PC; that, or godhood, which amounted to the same thing (since they were both absolutely unattainable). All of us dreamed of finding a wishing ring, grabbing it before anyone else could reach it and gaining eternal life. Had we ever actually *found* a ring of wishes, we probably would have all killed each other right away—unless we were tipped off first by a pile of bones, remnants of previous parties, in front of the ring. ☺

What are your experiences with Immortality?

Thanks to Virgil Greene for this topic idea.

Samplers Galore

I have a large quantity of IR Samplers on hand. If anyone out there is going to a convention and is willing to take some along, please drop me a line! I'll send you Samplers and flyers, too. I'd particularly like to get the Samplers distributed at conventions with a large roleplaying element. GenCon and Origins would be particularly good.

Incidentally, it's easy to distribute the flyers and Samplers; all you have to do is drop them onto the "Free" table. They're almost always snapped up within hours.

The Project IV

It seems to me that it's a good idea to keep awareness of Interregnnum on the Internet high. One way to do that would be to announce the publication of each issue. Would that be excessive? Perhaps. But an announcement, along with a brief listing of the contents of the issue and contact information, might well bring in new readers and subscribers.

I'd like to get feedback from contributors on this. If everyone agrees that it's worth trying, one of the first things to do will be to decide how to list zines and their contents. I could whomp something up, of course; but perhaps some would prefer to write their own blurbs. It's something to think about, anyway.

Until next time,

—>Pete

THE LOG

THAT

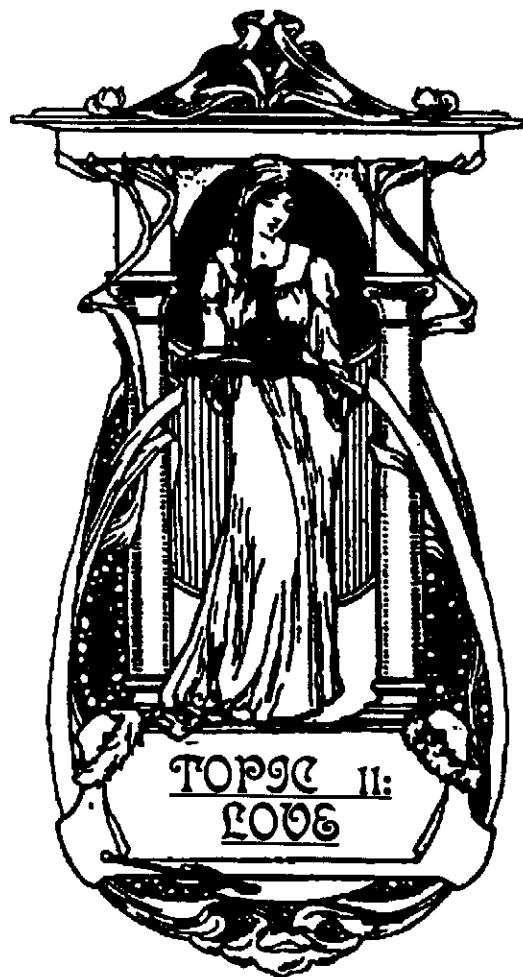
#11

RIBBONS

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Love: What is it? We all love gaming, I guess, or else we wouldn't do it. We all love writing, or at least we love the feeling of *having written*.

All right, I'll admit that "Love" might not have been the wisest choice for a topic. "Dumb" might be a better word for it; I'd forgotten that many people

are a bit sore on that subject, particularly in February. Retailers may love Valentine's Day, but for me the day isn't complete without a quote from Charlie Brown. "I know nobody likes me—why do we have to have a Valentine's Day to emphasize it?" ☺

Even though it was poor timing, I still must maintain that Love is part of a good roleplaying game. No, let me put that differently: Love as a subject of game play can be an important part of a good roleplaying experience. Not an indispensable element, but an enriching one. Envy, fear, anger, and avarice all have their place in even the most simplistic hack n' slash game; it takes a skilled GM to make love work in a game, but the effect should be proportionally greater and more meaningful.

On the other hand, I've never made much use of love *qua* love in a game. It has never been a major focus; I've used it tangentially (mother love as an NPC motivation, for example), but have never attempted to explore all the possibilities. Will I change that in the future? Perhaps, but I'm not particularly planning on it. It's just too tricky a subject.

Truth to tell, I chose Love as the topic because I was thinking about how much I *loved* my new laser printer. ☺

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☺ REVIEW: ☺ SPACE ACE

A CD-ROM multimedia video game for the IBM PC and compatibles

Publisher: ReadySoft

Cost: \$49

Requires: CD-ROM drive (300K/s or better) 4MB RAM, 386 or faster processor, VGA display.

Review machine: 486 DX/2 50 MHz, 8 MB RAM, double-speed CD-ROM drive (300K/s), 16-bit Diamond Speedstar Pro sound card (SoundBlaster compatible), 15-inch .28 pitch CTX SVGA screen

It probably wouldn't have been much longer before a hastily-formed group of software retailers would have stormed 81 Washington Street #2 *en masse* and pulled me shrieking from my bed. If I were lucky, they'd only pull my tongue out.

Let me explain: readers may remember my review of the Dragon's Lair CD-ROM in IR #4. At the end of the game, a promo for Space Ace played; it was described as "Coming Soon". That was in the summer of 1994; I assumed that "Soon" meant that year, maybe within a month or two, and so phoned store after store week after week.

The game has finally became available. Was it worth the wait?

Yes...yes, it was. And yet it's not perfect. For the most part, I could simply have recycled my review of *Dragon's Lair*, naturally enough, the games are very similar. There are some differences, though, which I'll detail.

For those not familiar with this style of game, here's how it works: an animated scene is played onscreen, with fully cinematic music and voices. As the scene progresses, the hero must make certain moves; these are defined as left, right, up (or forward), down (or back), and blaster (or sword, in DL). If the proper button is not pressed at approximately the right time, the scene stops abruptly and is replaced by a quick view of the hero's amusing death. If every button is pressed

correctly for all the scenes, the hero eventually triumphs and reaches a happy ending. Effectively the whole thing is a long animated cartoon, with limited alternative (death) tracks. I haven't had a chance to time the whole thing when played flawlessly, but I don't suppose it lasts longer than half an hour.

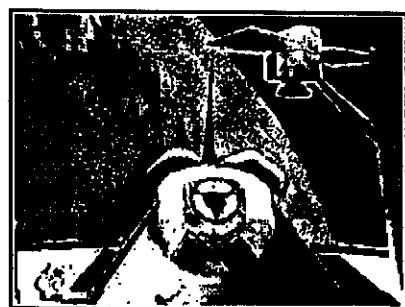
The source material (a laser-disk video game created by movie animator and producer Don Bluth, formerly with Disney), is outstanding—of course. As Dragon's Lair skillfully drew on the archetypes of cinematic fantasy, so Space Ace evokes the great moments of science fiction from the movies. It's an extremely effective technique, though I have to wonder how they got away with it. One scene was so closely based on Star Wars that I'm sure that George Lucas' lawyers must have stirred restlessly in their coffins...

The strong leavening of humor helps the game, too. I died quite a few times, simply because I was laughing too hard to press the buttons. In one case I died several times on purpose to just to watch the death scene (it was the scene on the motorcycle). Even after I'd mastered the game entirely, I still played it several times just to enjoy the cartoon.

What else?

Compared to Dragon's Lair, Space Ace is somewhat less...would "exploitative" be the right word? Can you exploit a cartoon? I don't know. But it's safe to say that while the red-haired heroine Kimberly certainly has some cheesecake-like qualities, she's nowhere near as hyperdeveloped as the Princess from Dragon's Lair (who probably would have had difficulty standing up in normal gravity), and her clothing is comparatively modest. She's also considerably more active and intelligent, though at times a bit of a nag.

Timing is handled a little strangely; often the correct button can be pressed well before the choice comes up on the screen. In several cases it's almost required to jump



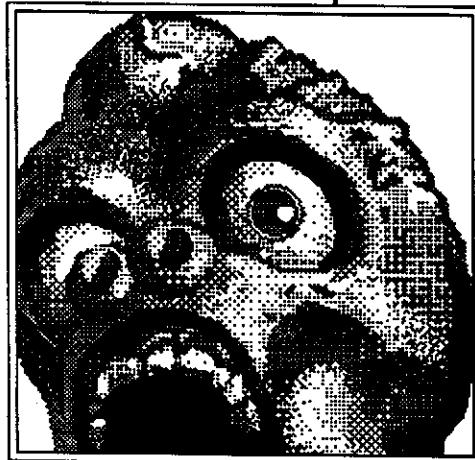
the gun this way; if you wait until the choice flashes on the screen, you're dead. In the roller-skating maze a whole series of buttons must be pressed with their own staccato rhythm, without reference to the screen. Tricky.

Some choices of action are extremely confusing. Of course the decisions couldn't all be obvious (got to suck in those quarters somehow), but there are times when two virtually identical actions can require different keystrokes—"up", and "left", for example. At one or two points the correct choice is the opposite of what you'd expect from the action onscreen. Programming error? Maybe.

On the other hand, this game makes good use of mirroring; some scenes are completely reversed sometimes, which makes it necessary to figure out the pattern and invert it, rather than simply memorize keystrokes. In this regard Space Ace has an edge over DL, which had little mirroring.

Where Space Ace really stands above

Dragon's Lair is in its multi-tracking. It actually allows you to make a choice at several points, and that choice changes the game. The hero, Ace, has been hit with the Infanto Ray; the effect is to turn him into a whining, gawky kid, strangely reminiscent of Jerry Lewis (particularly his voice—and yet somehow it's actually funny. Go figure.). Every so often Ace gets the option to Energize, pressing a button on his wristband to recover his previous strength and size (a very dramatic and effective scene). When he does so, the action changes. In general it becomes longer, more drawn-out and difficult but also more interesting. The Energized and non-Energized scenes are different enough to make it worthwhile playing them both ways. Of course, Ace always gets hit again or reverts to kid-form by the end of the scene. It's important to note that in some cases Ace **must** energize, or he'll die. That's definitely true in the final scene.



There does seem to be one bug. In the Space Station, after getting through the corridors (and if energize, dodging the guards), Ace dodges and runs by a laser projector. He then gets the option to energize. If he doesn't, he jumps from one flying platform to another, finally jumping off just before the last one smashes to pieces. However, the scene freezes a second or so before he jumps; a left jump at the right time is necessary, or he'll die. It's difficult without the screen cues, but by no means impossible.

Synchronization is a bit of a problem. The voices and pictures are sometimes noticeably off. It's not bad enough to ruin the game, but it *is* a definite flaw.

One of my biggest complaints is with the ending. Throughout the game, Kimberly has been called Ace "Dexter"; he always responds with "Call me Ace, huh?" The ending gives the punchline, as well as providing a nice feeling of closure (something I consider important for a game). Unfortunately in the CD-ROM version the scene ends so quickly that the last moments are almost impossible to understand—and in any case, by this point the voices and picture are too disconnected to make the joke obvious. Of course I realize that there are serious limitations on how much

information can be stored on a single CD-ROM; scenes through the game were truncated, which was mildly disturbing but not unacceptable.

However, that the ending—the point of the whole thing—is ruined by the data-cheapness of the programmers is a serious flaw. It's particularly annoying because there are *two* animated promos for other games on the disk. If they could have spared just one second from one of the other promos they could have improved the game enormously. For that the game gets a one-third grade reduction.

One final note: the game does include the full promo for Space Ace as well, which is worth watching for itself. It would make a good talking screen saver, too.

Rating: A-

ALONE TO BOSKONE

After the smashing success of Arisia in January, I had a deep hunger to go to more science fiction conventions. Boskone seemed the obvious first choice; after all, it had been described as the second half of Arisia in a zine in *The Wild Hunt* some time ago. Most of my friends weren't going to attend, but I decided to go anyway. I might have some fun, and could distribute copies of the *IR* Sampler.

Late Saturday morning I lugged the large box of Samplers and flyers into the car and started out. I had directions of a sort from an enthusiastic blurb by the editor in "The World's Best Editorial Humor" comic newspaper (a stupid name—I preferred "The Boston Comic News"). Unfortunately they weren't the most detailed, and so I ended up on a considerable detour before reaching the hotel: the Framingham Tara.

The hotel was something of a disappointment. The doorman was dressed in a Beefeater costume; he looked silly and out of place. The layout was confusing and dull. Where Arisia's Boston Park Plaza had had a soaring lobby with the convention clearly visible along the upper perimeter, this low-ceilinged place felt like a businessmen's motel.

A large bearded science-fiction fan lead me to the con. Something about the way he spoke, and about the way the people around me looked, made me think that this would be quite a different experience from Arisia.

It was. I managed to check in without difficulty (not surprising, given that it was now Saturday afternoon), and wandering around soon realized that Boskone had an oddly *older* feeling than Arisia. There were no costumes, and the average age of attendees was definitely higher—it seemed that I was one of the younger people there. The whole



affair was more restrained, quieter and somehow less fun than Arisia had been. In fact, it was pretty boring. Perhaps that's because I didn't have anyone to hang around with. I did see George Phillies, and Bill Ricker of TWH, but both were otherwise occupied.

I'd hoped to distribute some of the Samplers at the roleplaying area. However, at check in I was told that there was no roleplaying area—an ominous sign. After unloading the Samplers on the only "free" table, I set out to have some fun.

The layout of the hotel was extremely poor. Long bare corridors separated the huckster's room, art show, and various function rooms; I wandered about aimlessly, at one point approaching the pool closely enough to get a strong whiff of chlorine. The con was spread through the hotel, difficult to keep track of.

The huckster's room was interesting, though. It concentrated much more heavily on books than Arisia (or I-con) had; though it was smaller than both those cons, it easily had more book dealers.

I have to be in the right mood to comb through thousands of unalphabetized old books, and I didn't feel up to it then. However, one stand interested me very much: that of NESFA Press. Not only did they have their new complete collection of *Cordwainer Smith*'s short science fiction, *The Rediscovery of Man* (Virgil had given me a copy for Xmas), but they also had a new hardcover version of *Norstrilia*, his only novel—and a concordance of Smith's work, as well! I grabbed them, along with a collection of *Mack Reynolds*' work (I always liked his stuff). They weren't cheap, but I managed to save a little money by joining NESFA; they give a large discount to members.

I continued to wander about. After buying another copy of the issue of *Shadis* with the *IR* review, I

picked up a copy of Jack Finney's sequel to his classic Time After Time: From Time to Time.

I may as well wrap the rest of the con up; there wasn't much more to it. I did lose my copy of *Norstrilia* almost immediately, and was unable to find it; I ended up buying another copy from NESFA. I also picked up a collection of postcards featuring the work of **Roger Dean**, the artist who painted most of the covers of *Yes*'s albums. I've liked his stuff for years. That done, I headed out.

All in all, it was a pretty boring experience. I'm not sorry I went, but it was definitely no Arisia. The whole affair had a strong atmosphere of *old fandom*, if you know what I mean; it was like a bit of science fiction history, something out of the thirties or forties. The language and attitudes all seemed to represent a strong subculture—I can't put it any better than that. As a result, it was somehow less friendly and open.

It's strange that I'm now a member of NESFA; if anything of interest should come from that, I'll write about it here.

CORDWAINER SMITH

There's probably little point in reviewing the new NESFA editions of the works of Cordwainer Smith.

After all, these are part of the enduring canon of science fiction; though Paul Linebarger (Smith) never received the attention he should have from mainstream critics, his works have a place on any science fiction fan's bookshelf. If you haven't read Smith, you should—he was one of the best. And NESFA Press deserves great credit for bringing all of his science fiction back into print.

Some random bits and pieces: the NESFA edition of *Norstrilia* is the most complete yet, as it includes not only the text of the complete novel, but also the "bridge" chapters that Smith wrote when he was forced to break it into two separate books.

The collection of short fiction is also extremely complete. There were two stories that I hadn't read before, both of which were completed by his widow from his notes: "Himself In Anachron" and "Down to A Sunless Sea". Neither possesses the magic quality of Smith's own works, however, and so they were rather disappointing.

The Concordance is a GBC (plastic coiled comb) bound book which lists terms from Smith's works and give ten-to-forty word definitions. It's interesting, and dedicated Smith fans will find it worth buying; however, it too falls short. Smith's work is supposed to be filled with obscure references and odd tricks: for example, there's one section in "Quest of the Three

Worlds" in which the first letters of a paragraph spell out the words "Kennedy shot". I'd liked to hear more about that sort of thing, but there was little of that in this edition. Most of the entries are descriptions from the books, along with a listing of the source language when appropriate (for example, the names of many characters are actually numbers in a wide variety of foreign tongues). I was also much amused to discover that the "ancient" city of Meeya Meefla was in fact Miami, Fla. Still, this work reveals only a small portion of the quirks that I'm sure permeate Smith's work. It's interesting, but mildly disappointing.

Ratings: *Norstrilia* A+, *The Rediscovery of Man* A+, *The Cordwainer Smith Concordance* B.



F5 FOLLIES

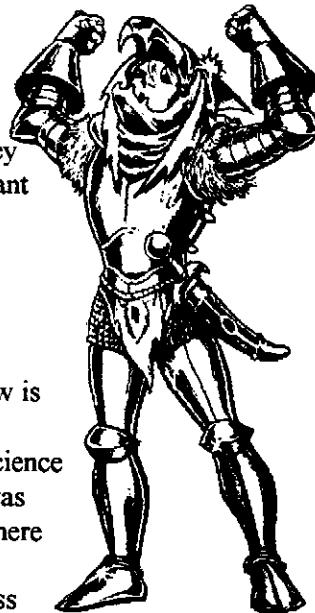
To my amazement, the clowns at Factsheet 5 actually *published* the "asshole" review they mailed to me. It seems they find revenge more important than the appearance of impartiality. I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised...

Interestingly, the review is published in the "Quirky" section, rather than the Science Fiction section where it was review previously (and where other RPG magazines are reviewed). I can only guess that they wanted to make sure that no science fiction reader might see it, and subscribe. I guess I'm lucky; with that sort of deep-seated hostility, they'd probably hunt me down and kill me if I lived in their area. ☺

...WITH LOVE?

I have an odd ability—actually, I have several odd abilities. The one in question, however, is the strange ability to *recognize* people. Particularly actors. I'm always the first to recognize a known actor in an unfamiliar role. It usually takes me a while to convince others, but the credits almost always bear me out. For example, recently I picked out Ted Danson in an unusual supporting role in *Body Heat*. And years ago I was amazed to spot *Dr. Who's* Tom Baker behind the evil vizier's beard in *The Golden Voyage of Sinbad*.

So what? Well, not long ago TBS had one of their regular James Bond marathons, showing two movies per night for a week or more. I've been a Bond fan for a long time; I read the books as a teenager, and still own a few of them (as well as a copy of *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, also by Bond author Ian Fleming). The character of Ernst Stavro Bleufeld, evil mastermind of SPECTRE, was always one of the most interesting to me. That part has been played by several different actors; the two that I recall are Donald Pleasance and



Charles Grey, who also played "No-neck", the narrator from *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*.

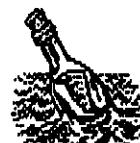
In one movie, however, the actor who plays Bleufeld is not seen. In *From Russia With Love* (starring Sean Connery as Bond, in my opinion the only legitimate actor to play the part apart from David Niven in *Casino Royale*) Bleufeld is filmed from behind only. His hands may be seen around the back of his evil-looking chair as he pets his cat and speaks to his terrified subordinates, but his face remains a mystery.

I've solved that mystery. Watching *FRWL* late at night, I suddenly realized who that voice must be—it was disguised, but there was no way to completely erase the vocal characteristics of that well-known actor, even if the producers had wanted to. And I don't think they did. The identity of the actor made it clear that this was an in-joke, and the listing in the credits made it clear. "Bleufeld.....?" Indeed.

Perhaps others have already recognized that voice—I'm sure I'm not the only one to figure it out. Still, if you hadn't guessed before listen carefully the next time you watch *From Russia With Love*. Behind that carefully repressed accent you'll hear none other than...Sean Connery! It seems that James Bond was his own worst enemy. 8^>}

COMMENTS #10

Doug Jorenby: How ironic that your warning against Top Ten lists should appear on the opposite page of my own Top Ten list! Will anyone believe that we didn't arrange that in advance?



* The Python CD-ROM sounds very appealing. Does it still waste much of your time? Do you have it on your machine at work? Are you in trouble yet? ☺

* I'm surprised that Cinemania '95 doesn't have a "Back" feature, since the '94 version does. Maybe Microsoft had to squeeze out more space for all the movies that were made in the meantime?

* As for Wonder, play has actually begun—and yet the game proper *hasn't* (I'll explain that nextish). Fortunately there seems to be no great danger of munchkinism so far. I've had some experience at trying to depict dreams in a game; I'll leave it for the players to decide how successful I've been (perhaps some of them will write about it here).

George Phillies: It was good to see you at Boskone, George. I hope you had more fun than I did.

* I was glad to see another part of "The Warrior Unseen"—it really is a fascinating and well-done story. I can understand why the reviewer from *Shadis* singled out the fiction of *IR* for praise...

* The cyberstory was interesting too, though at first I was mildly confused—I didn't realize that it was a new story (I soon figured it out, though). That sort of story is becoming more and more common in the genre, it seems.

Curtis Taylor: Do you pay for your art, Curtis? What are the terms? I was always under the impression that commercial art was just too expensive for a non-profit publication.

* You know, I really should go over my old zines; I have to find out why everyone thinks that I'm some sort of foaming-at-the-mouth maniac on the subject of AD&D. ☺ I've played it often myself, even as recently as four or five years ago. Heck, I even listed the game in the *IR* Glossary! And TSR just sent me a big pile of promotional material...on the other hand, they don't know me. ☺

Chris Aylott: It was good to see you at Arisia, too! And welcome to *Interregnum*, Chris. I'm glad to have you aboard, as often as you can make it.

* I can strongly recommend *The Babylon Project* to all readers with even a slight interest in *Babylon 5* or TV science fiction; and not only because I have a zine in issue #3. ☺ It's a fine production.

* It's ironic that you got into *IR* because of issues that you picked up at Pandemonium, since Tyler, the owner of Pandemonium, has decided not to carry *IR* any longer. When he made that decision he lost my patronage. Nor will I be recommending the store to anyone (I'm sure I've sent several thousands of dollars of business his way over the years). Not an intelligent business decision on his part.

* It's a pity that you're moving so far away, since you'd be welcome to play in Wonder—and I wouldn't mind playing in some of your games, too. The Lantern Kingdom campaign sounds like a lot of fun, and I'd have liked to have played in the re-start.



* Best of luck with *The Space-Crime Continuum!* It sounds like a great idea: a store that specializes in my two favorite genres. Of course you can have as many *IR* flyers and Samplers as you like, and if possible I'll try to get some promotional copies of the regular issues to you, too. Or will you be coming to the Boston area on occasion? I don't really know how far

away the Pioneer Valley is (someone told me it's about a two hour drive).

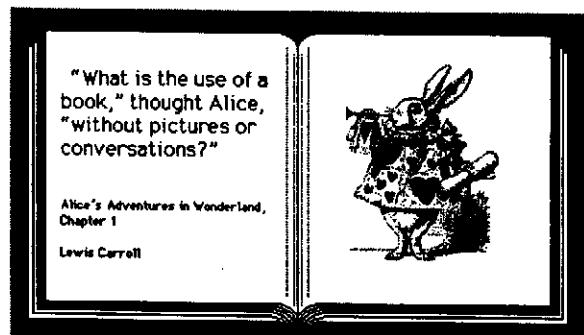
* Some suggestions:

➤ To play up the dual nature of the store, why not publish a list of writers who've worked in both genres? Fredric Brown leaps to mind, but I know of dozens more (Mack Reynolds, Lloyd Biggle, Ron Goulart, Anthony Boucher...), and I'm sure that a search of the various listings would turn up hundreds. You could post that list to the Boston-book email list, and the various books newsgroups, for one thing.

➤ Old books are vitally important, of course. They're 90% of the reason that I go to a store. The only bookstore I regularly visit that doesn't have used books is Wordsworth in Harvard Square, and that's because they always get new books in first and have a huge collection of Dover clipart books.

➤ Used games—particularly roleplaying games—would probably be a draw. There are a lot of them out there, and a lot of science fiction readers are RPG players; I know that I've picked up a number of cheap used games, not because I expected to play them but simply as reading material or out of nostalgia.

➤ A rare-book search service would also be a good idea. Wordsworth has an exceptional one with a high success rate; I think they actually advertise in rare-book journals. Alternatively you could have people file special requests with you. You could then screen your incoming used stock for matches to the requests. Heck, I'll put in a standing request for Lord Dunsany and Fredric Brown right now! ☺



You'll need to cultivate rare distributors, which will probably require some detective work. Books from publishers like NESFA Press or Black Lizard are almost never seen on the chain-store circuit, but it's the chance of finding a book that's off the beaten path that motivates me to search out a store.

➤ Personally I don't think a book store is complete without a cat. However, that's a difficult decision to make. For one thing, some people are allergic. For another, I really don't know how you train a cat to be a store-cat. How do you teach them not to scratch obnoxious customers, or keep them from sharpening their claws on those tempting \$20 volumes? I don't know, but several used book stores around here have managed it.



Tara & Jenny Glover: Glad to see you again!

I appreciate the difficulty of contributing from across the Atlantic, since you have a considerably smaller window of opportunity between receiving an issue and mailing your zine for the next one.

* Please accept my apologies for forgetting to correct the author listing in your zine last issue. It completely slipped my mind.

* It's interesting that Moria offers greater opportunity to male characters, as opposed to female ones; could this be some sort of secret propaganda attempt on the part of the programmers? An anti-feminist ploy? I hope you won't let that sort of thing influence you, Tara. ☺

Moria sounds much like Rogue or Hack—I suppose it's another variant, though it would seem that it offers much more flexibility. Do you descend through level after level, in search of some sort of ultimate talisman?

* I'm glad to hear that you like *The Jungle Books*, Tara; as I've noted here before, I'm a big fan too. If I ever get "The Jungle" LARP together and ready to run we'll have a special wolf character for you to play. Of course, by the time the game is ready to play you may be too busy on your Master's thesis to fly to the US... ☺

* Tara sleeps surrounded by books? I can go her one better: my bedroom is paved with books, sometimes nearly a foot deep. I have to levitate to get out of bed. ☺

Dale Meier: There are times when I wonder why it is that *Interregnum* has attracted so much high-quality fiction. Looking at it as dispassionately as I can, it still seems far better than most of the fan fiction I've read in other publications. Needless to say, I'm not complaining. ☺

* Is "Tales From the Angel's Brigade" going to be a serialized short story, or part of a novel? Is it already finished, or a work in progress? What are your plans for it?

It reminded me a little of Jim Starlin's groundbreaking *Dreadstar* comic book—not the crappy version that's published now, but the original Epic stuff. It's the religious angle, I suppose. Of course Starlin was bitterly criticized at the time, and accused of being anti-Catholic.

* The *Star Wars* material sounds very interesting. Not too long ago I saw some of it at a local science-fiction specialty store; thanks to your reviews I was tempted, though I haven't done anything with the game.

* Robb Repp, TSR's (former?) Net representative, did indeed attach a copyright notice to every post he made in the TSR newsgroup—and yes, that's probably impossible. Silly, in fact, since the post by necessity must be copied to millions of machines. But who ever said that those corporate boneheads weren't silly? ☺

* I believe that my copy of the *Star Wars* RPG is the second edition. I'd double-check, but it was so dreadful that I buried it beneath 2,000 pounds of old papers. By the time I dig it up again, it will probably have undergone some sort of weird pressure-transformation.

Mark Sabalauskas: Glad to see you back again, Mark! I hope we'll see a zine from you a little more often, if you can.

* Thanks for the review of *Star Trek: Generations*. The bad word about that movie reached me quickly enough that I never bothered to go see it. From all reports Kirk's death was highly unsatisfactory. It seems that with the death of Gene Roddenberry there's no one with authority over *Star Trek* who actually *cares* about the show—which explains the excrable *Voyager*. That's why *Babylon 5* is doing as well as it is, I think; the people who run it are real science fiction fans, not corporate flacks out to make a buck off of what they see as pathetic nerds.

Gee, that sounds kind of negative, doesn't it? ☺

NEXT ISSUE:

A review of *The Lathe of Heaven* video, the beginning (and a before-the-beginning scenario) of the Wonder campaign, another guest...should be lots of stuff. Take care!

→Pete

COLOPHON

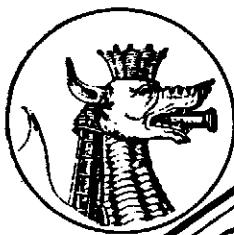
The Log That Flies #11 was gestated in a *P. Maranci 30,999 brain*. Much of the text was then written with *PC-Write 2.5*, an ancient but serviceable *villain* word processor.

The text was formatted for desktop publication using *Publish-It 4.0 for Windows*, a cranky but cheap DTP program.

The DTPed document was printed on an Okidata OL400e 300 dpi laser printer.

It's not easy coming up with these stupid little quotes, you know. ☺

→Pete



GUEST COLUMNIST: RICH STAATS

Love in the Dungeon

by Rich Staats

© Rich Staats, March 1995

Ah love! Andrew Lloyd Webber warns us that "Love changes everything, but not always for the better." His adage is certainly true in the realm of role-playing games. Love can: spice up an encounter, add motivation for a session, or bring the gaming table crashing down around the gamemaster's ears. In this article, we will examine some ways to spice up a Campaign using love as a motivation and some guidelines for love's introduction to avoid potentially embarrassing situations and maximize both the players' and the gamemaster's enjoyment of the game. We will consider love from its broadest definition and include items ranging from pure lust (e.g. sexual orientation) to platonic (e.g. adoration). There are many factors which should be considered when determining if and when love should rear its idyllic head in the Campaign; these include: the composition of the playing group, the genre of the Campaign, and the personality of the gamemaster. [Warning: this article contains mature themes which may be inappropriate for children.]

The most important factor for determining how and when to introduce love into a Campaign is the make-up of the playing group. The maturity level of the group is a driving factor in determining the range of ways love can manifest itself while the mixture of players and their interpersonal relationships point to likely Player Characters (PC's) for a romantic

interlude. For example, I am currently conducting role-playing sessions with my three children (ages 8, 6 and 6); it would be grossly inappropriate to introduce notions of carnal lust into our sessions. On the other hand, while GameMastering (GMing) at MIT, I had no compunctions about introducing a gamut of love related complications and rewards into the Campaign ranging from platonic relationships and love of the gods to same-sex carnal entanglements.

The interests and maturity level of the group determined what is germane and interesting. In session wrap-ups, I typically ask the players what they liked and what they would like to see done differently in future sessions. During one such wrap-up a player stated "let's see something different to spice thing up; things are too much like a fairy tale. We want to see some variation in your sexual stereotypes!" The comment was half in jest, but it lead to the group's interaction with a gay prince and cross-dressing duchess. These became two of the group's staunchest allies, and it sated the appetite of the more politically correct members of the gaming group. ;-) (I have a caution about blind insertion of outre situations into your Campaign later.)

No matter what emotional or age level the players are at, it is possible to introduce love into the Campaign to add diversity. But, the particular aspects of love should be tailored to the gaming group. Even the youngest players recognize some forms of love. Children can identify with the love they feel towards their parents, and the love the children feel toward their pets. Adventures which involve kidnapping children or rescuing parents are very effective at the early ages. A potential reward involving love for younger players could be gaining an unusual or interesting pet.

Older players can understand the deeper and less obvious forms of love. Love toward their nation or their love of God. The players may be able to identify with their own love of their children. As the players become more mature, you can introduce complications which embrace a conflict between two valid loves. The PC loves his spouse, but to save the town, he must let her die. This can involve some great moments of role-playing.

Even with the most well grounded and mature groups, it is best to pre-screen your love related notions before springing them on the unsuspecting party. The good GM knows his or her party members. It works best for the group and the GM to avoid situations in the Campaign which closely mirror incidents in the players' lives. (Discard this advice at your own peril.) What would happen if an uncaring GM decided to have a whole scenario revolve around the death of a PC's father only to find out that the player had lost a parent in a grisly car wreck? The GM is well served to ask questions about potentially embarrassing or incendiary issues before opening them up on the gaming table. I always asked the players before I introduced a love interest for them; almost always they agreed. In one example though, a player confided they had been raped by a person matching the general description of the NPC! :-O (You can bet I immediately backed off from that option!!!)

Love does not have to involve just NPC-PC interactions. Love triangles solely involving NPCs can provide great fodder for party interactions. Another excellent Campaign ploy is to have the party act as matchmakers for a pair of pining lovers. A truly enjoyable experience is to have the party STOP a romance involving unsuitable parties. :-) "Love is blind!"

When introducing love, try to bring it up in a way that is realistic and sincere. It does not make sense for the princess to immediately fall madly and deeply in love with the random rogue (i.e. PC) wandering half-bathed through her court. (She might fake such a love for a variety of nefarious reasons.) Likewise, the prince might confess his love to a PC in order to bed such a person. Love takes time, and it is even more rewarding for the players to see their characters building up a nurturing, loving relationship over an extended period. I have literally seen players in their late twenties jump for joy at having an NPC return their PCs' love; it was a cool moment at the gaming table. :-)

It is not only the players who need to be comfortable with the topics raised. Ultimately it is the GM's game, and the GM must be comfortable with the subject matter at hand. I call this being consistent with your own moral and political "comfort zones". If the

subject matter is offensive to you then reject it and plan something else. There is no shame in this. You are the GM after all. It would be the height of arrogance for a gaming group to ask you to devote dozens of hours preparing a scenario you are not useful with. Likewise, make sure that you are objective on the particular issue. If you've recently gone through a devastating divorce, it is probably just as well to avoid any major love involvements in the Campaign for a bit.

Once you introduce a love interest, let the players take the lead on it. One of my parties had a hard time maintaining henchmen. The group got a very bad reputation, especially with halflings who rarely returned after signing on with the party. One particular halfling named Myrtle did survive though due in large part to the repeated intervention of one of the PCs, Tremir. Now, Tremir was elvish, and the PC wanted nothing to do with Myrtle which was all well in good until one of the other PCs (playing Tremir's brother), Granth, dropped a love potion into Myrtle's canteen while she and Tremir went out on a recon. Tremir continued to politely rebuff Myrtle, but Myrtle was nothing if not persistent. Eventually, Tremir received a wish and used it (with Myrtle's permission) to transform her into an elf. Tremir and Myrtle ended up founding a line which lasted over a millennia in Campaign years. It was actually quite a touching session.

Happy gaming, and may Uleria smile on you and your players! :-)



THE EIGHT TRACK MIND #10 & 11

Special Double Issue! (yeah, that's it :))

Ramblings on RPGs, SF, and Misc.

© Virgil S. Greene November 1994
email: klyfix@ace.com

Well, due to holiday blahs I didn't get in the last issue of IR. As I wish to keep the issue number of the Eight Track Mind the same as that of IR and as things in this issue would have been in the last we're giving this one two numbers. That makes sense, right? :)



Now the official topic for issue 10...

BURNOUT

I could say that my absence from the last issue was a profoundly eloquent commentary on the Official Topic and leave it at that....

But that would be inaccurate.

I figure that there's actually two different problems here. One is "burnout" as in over-indulgence; after many, many sessions of play one can get sick of the routine. This will happen more quickly if the campaign(s) end up being the same old thing over and over again ("gee, another ten level dungeon with a zillion kobolds and a lich at the bottom"). Variety is the spice of life and of the campaign; vary the settings and styles. One could also occasionally have an alternate one session

adventure that's different from the running campaign, maybe even using a different system. I think "Paranoia" and "Twerps" should lend themselves to this.

The other problem is getting "burned". Burned by a system, a company, or a gamemaster. Perhaps one buys a system that turns out to be absolute garbage and sours you on gaming. Perhaps a company elects to change their system drastically, or ends up requiring a million supplements in order to do the slightest thing with the system.

But I'll bet most commonly people are burned by the evil or incompetent GM. Note Our Esteemed Editor's "Gamemaster Hall of Shame" from IR 10 or the famous video. When a GM shows favoritism ("So my girlfriend's character has three Artifacts of Power and five times your experience points, what of it?") or seeks to kill player characters or has a grudge against a player it can really trash the game.

Of course one can also be burned by bad players. If the players consistently have a differing view of how the game should be played or haven't a clue as to how to play an RPG the GM and other players can get rather annoyed. Sometimes this isn't intentional; you don't always know what kind of game you're getting into and play inappropriately, and of course there's always novices.

My feeling is that one shouldn't give up all gaming because of one or even a few negative experiences. And sometimes it is just a good idea to cut some slack; don't always impose your vision of The One True Game on others or expect them to live up to it.

NEW STUFF

* The Embrace

Courtesy of our esteemed editor, I acquired a promo copy of The Embrace, which has just been released by White Wolf. Unfortunately I didn't get the review in the last issue of IR, beating the

publication date; but hopefully this will still be of value. It's written by Mark Rein-Hagen (the creator of WW's World of Darkness setting) and Robert Weinberg (World Fantasy medalist, expert on horror and the macabre).

The book (more of a novella) takes the form of a diary and in the final hard cover release will in fact look like a diary with handwritten pages, postcards and other inserts. It is a record of the events leading up to a man becoming, well, something else. The protagonist, Auston Jacobson, starts keeping a diary after having bizarre dreams in which he is a wolf or hawk attacking and consuming a person. Sometimes the person is a young girl, sometimes himself.

During the course of the diary he meets a woman who is his ultimate heart's desire. He also meets the owner of the nightclub he works at; a strange sort with strange associates. Things go well for him for a while; he ends up being the club's DJ and has a true loving relationship with the woman, Danya.

But ultimately we learn that the dreams were a sort of premonition; the owner of the club is an ancient vampire who desires a new...child, for lack of a better term. He forcibly make Auston into a vampire, forces him to feed, and instructs him in vampiric lore. From then on the diary involves the conflict with his human nature and the bestial nature of his new vampirism.

The book is reasonably well written, and in the final form should be quite effective and perhaps disturbing. It should be noted that it very much follows the vision of vampires given in White Wolf's World of Darkness which is not necessarily the best version. It could be very good in giving Vampire: The Masquerade players a sense of the inner conflicts a new vampire should be facing if the campaign is heavy on that sort of struggle.

* Magic: The Gathering, Whispering Woods

By Clayton Emery
HarperPrism
US \$4.99, Canadian \$5.99



This is the first book in a trilogy about Gull, a woodcutter who finds himself caught up in the affairs of wizards. The story starts off with Gull and his younger, seemingly slow, sister Greensleeves living in the "Whispering Woods" near their family's village; so called from the sounds one hears there. Life is peaceful, until the perpetual battles of the great wizards come to their lands. Monsters and warriors and all manner of strange things are summoned to fight, and between them and the wizards deadly spells the village is destroyed and all Gull's family is killed except for Greensleeves. He barely escaped with his life, having to fight to survive and in the process meeting some of the unwilling "troops" that the wizards summoned to fight their battles.

Gull finds himself working for one of the wizards who battled at his village; a seemingly benign man named Towser. Towser travels around the Domains with quite a retinue and Gull replaces the freightmaster (animal handler, among other things) who was killed in the battle. He learns perhaps more than he wants to about the ways of wizards, and learns that the reason his sister was slow was a side effect of the woods when she starts

to talk and show intelligence. But there's more to both Towser and his sister than he originally thought.

I like this book better than *Arena*; it's more of a fun read. The use of the creatures and other references to things in the card game feels better (for lack of a better term) in this work. One thing I find interesting is that while in the Magic card game one is taking the role of a mighty wizard Gull's viewpoint is that of the little folk who are abused by such wizards. I also found the notion that the creatures we summon in the card game to fight would be doing so under coercion in a "real" setting. I don't know about the free card yet; there's a possibility that they might be just shipping one of the cards that we got with *Arena* which would be quite annoying and would act to discourage me from buying any more books in the series. But the book does give some sense perhaps of what a Magic: the Gathering RPG might be like.



Official Topic for IR 11...

LOVE

Well, this is not a topic I'm terribly comfortable about. My observations over time would indicate that a lot of relationships end in disaster which goes against my romanticized ideals of true commitment and all that. I haven't the foggiest idea how to deal with it.

But maybe in an RPG there's indirect ways of dealing with it. I've had one PC who was sort of forced into a marriage but that was sort of a background thing over the course of the campaign. In time, he'd probably have had to retire. My current "Pendragon" character, Ulprus, managed to marry really well the second time around. His wife is the Countess of Rydychan and one of his sons will be the future Earl of Rydychan. But "love" really didn't play much of a part in these marriages. The first was sort of a matter of honor and the second was in part in effort at social climbing.

I think "love" in an RPG would be really difficult to deal with and frankly probably just isn't worth it most of the time. Devotion, sure. Romance, maybe. But love? I think it would be really questionable.

OTHER STUFF

It appears that there will not be a new "Dr. Who" series on Fox TV. Fox apparently decided that it would not fit into their plans. Amblin and the BBC are still trying to make a new series a reality however. According to the Amblin fan liaison Jean-Marc Lofficier a new "Dr. Who" will be a new show and while sharing the overall setting of the original show will not be a continuation. In the Usenet discussions (where I got this information) Lofficier justifies this with the example of "Star Trek: The Next Generation"; they didn't bring back the original cast and start where they left off. I think that is a specious argument as STNG stayed in the same history and timeline and was in fact a continuation after a

fashion. There is little reason why a new Doctor could not be the eighth Doctor with some of the events and history of the original series as part of the timeline history of the new show. It would help earn the devotion of the old fans and could be done without intimidating the new viewers. Some things could be changed if necessary; things have changed before and the continuity already features such things as Atlantis being destroyed three times. It

isn't impossible to have a completely new "Dr. Who" that is a real continuation of the original.

COMMENTS ON IR #9



* The Log That Flies #9, Peter Maranci

On Wonder: Looks ambitious...

On Resurrection: I'd forgotten about the dwarf's resurrection. My logic was that, well, the Mostali are wrong; something survives death. This is contrary to official Glorantha Lore (but I wasn't running in Glorantha as such) but made more sense to me.

* Scenario, Rich Staats

Interesting...

* Session Notes #23, Doug Jorenby

On RPG comics: I didn't include "Fineous Fingers" because the current version in Shadis by J.A. Holmgren isn't that great. It may be getting better, though.

* Refugee #17, George Phillies

On 17: Old MITSFS joke? I don't grok.

* Who Is John Galt? #9, Curtis Taylor

On Fallen Empires: Much to my dismay, I nearly have a complete set of FE, missing only Vodalian Knights, River Merfolk, and a couple artifacts.

* Aye, Matey #VII, Scott Ferrier

On Gaming Stores: Seems to be a pretty complete list to this carless wanderer.

On Joe's Deck: It is evil and should be burned.
:)

* Peaceable Demeanor #8, Collie Collier

On Stress and Gaming: I perform rather poorly under stress and know it. I generally prefer not to have stress while gaming. But...I will admit that in character there is something to having to really work to accomplish something and there is a greater satisfaction. On the other hand, failure leads to something like the Duck situation I noted in ETM #1; stress that magnifies stress in real life.

On "Greed Day" (from the mailing list): When I suggested that we separate the religious and secular aspects of Christmas that wasn't quite what I had in mind. :) I think gift giving and some kind of mid-winter celebration is a good thing, but I think that it detracts from the religious celebration and sort of cuts out the non-Christians if it is tied to Christmas.

* Softly, Softly, Tara and Jenny Glover

Thanks for the kind words! :)

On gaming being dominated by spotty 14 year old boys: I don't think that's just a British thing. I think a lot of immature boys like to indulge in violent and sexist fantasies in their gaming and don't want "girls" cramping their style. Hmm, actually I recall someone a little older than that whose games seemed to pretty much be "rape quests" and he liked it that way.

Now my group of gamers is far from our teen-age years for the most part, but I think a young'un would be welcome if they're reasonably mature and could get into our styles of gaming.

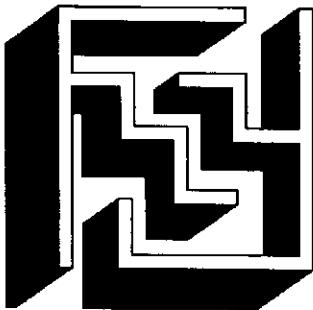
* Strange Sands, Gilbert Pili

On Harn: What, no massive combat in the first session? :) Actually that's a good thing.

On Twerps: I'd be perfectly happy to do a one session thing at some point; I have a general idea for a scenario. Might not necessarily be humorous.

On Thieves' World: The remarkable thing about it was that people from some of the companies that produced the various systems contributed to it. Nowadays if you try to produce a cross-system product somebody (Palladium and TSR, maybe?) would sue.

COMMENTS ON IR # 10



* The Log That Flies #10

On Arisia: I'd like to go next year; hopefully I can pay ahead and save the big bucks. Looks like it was fun.

On the GOP Regime: I've found that media bias tends to be in the eye of the beholder; I recall one person complaining about bias against Reagan (early 80s) when I think it was obvious that Carter was treated far worse. To be sure, I don't see the nightly news shows due to my work hours. They may well be giving the GOP a sort of "honeymoon" for the first 100 days and the stuff on the Contract that's been voted on so far has generally not been all that controversial; they're just now getting to the hard stuff. I find that in "Editorial Humor" (Boston Comic News) the editorial comics are starting to get downright vicious about the GOP and Newt.

* Session Notes #24, Doug Jorenby

On INWO: Illuminati is pretty cool; its biggest flaw is that I've never won in several games. :) Well, actually, there are problems in trying to play personalities and places because of all the ways to destroy them. Japan and California tend to die really quickly. But the comic value of things like making

Count Dracula the Messiah might make up for the disadvantages.

On animating the dead: I've heard of folk animating dead companions so that they wouldn't have to carry the bodies out of the dungeon. :)

* Refugee #197, George Phillies

On Gingrich Khan: My current apocalyptic scenario goes like this. A GOP President is elected in 1996, and the GOP retains control of the Congress. But the country doesn't really do all that well. So in the 2000 elections the Demos regain control of the Presidency and Congress. Unfortunately extreme Conservative True Believers decide that they don't want to have them evil liberals running things again and attempt to overthrow the government.

I don't consider that impossible. There are already people organizing militias to resist what they perceive as government oppression. I've talked (on a local BBS) with folk who consider liberalism to be an evil. Considering the whining I saw when Clinton got elected after 12 years of Republican presidents I think that some of the flaky might well go over the edge.

On the fiction: I gather that things are starting to get weird? :)

* Who Is John Galt? #10, Curtis Taylor

On AD&D: One can pretty much play by memory, yup. :) In a real sense, the system isn't as important as the setting, GM'ing, and other aspects of the game.

On INWO: At one point, your list was the only list people had to work with as far as assessing trades. Cool. :)

* The Parliament Of Dreams #1, Chris Aylott

On The Big Story: Someday I'd like to get into one of those multi-year massive campaigns, but alas, that'll will probably not be until I'm in the rest home or the afterlife.

On Gaming as Art: The fun's the thing, and if "art" gets in the way than there's little point.

On B5: I'm now getting to watch it since WSBK started showing it on Saturday afternoons. I've been truly impressed.

* Softly, Softly; Tara and Jenny Glover

On Internet and Usenet: My link is such that we miss a lot of the messages and they still pile up. And then you have to glean the worthy stuff. alt.tv.babylon5 got sidetracked into an argument over sexuality and rec.tv.drwho (group names may be wrong as my system renames them) gets clogged by the Yadlee person and his strange comments about how all American things stink and are Satanic. :) Still, there's interesting stuff.

On Books: Hmm, so many things are part of a series these days *sigh*. I end up buying used SF and occasional fantasy these days.

* Tales From The Electronic Underground #10, Vol. 1, Dale Meier

On "Tales From the Angel's Brigade": Good stuff!

On Marvel: From my recollections of the Marvel Universe (about 12 years out of date) it seemed to me to be too big. There seemed to be sooo many heroes and villains and other stuff; I have to wonder how the regular people could survive. But the "X-Men" redefinition sounded a bit extreme.

On Vampires and a Bibliography: Uhhh, well, most of the stuff was purely out of my imagination or interpretation of the general views of vampires. Some things were from memory; hopefully in the future I can refresh it a bit.

A lot of alternate vampire stories got published over the years in The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction. There was also a man whose name totally escapes me that did some research and determined that vampires

are real and did a survey of them. Supposedly the largest concentration is in Wisconsin. He's been in hiding because he stumbled onto a Satanic cult that got upset with him, supposedly. And on one of the local BBSs a woman wrote about a friend who got initiated into a sort of "vampire club"; part of the initiation involved the other members tasting her blood. Weird.

I think the Cyberpunk RPG from R. Talsorian has a supplement with technological vampires.

* The Pen and Sword, Mark Sabalauskas

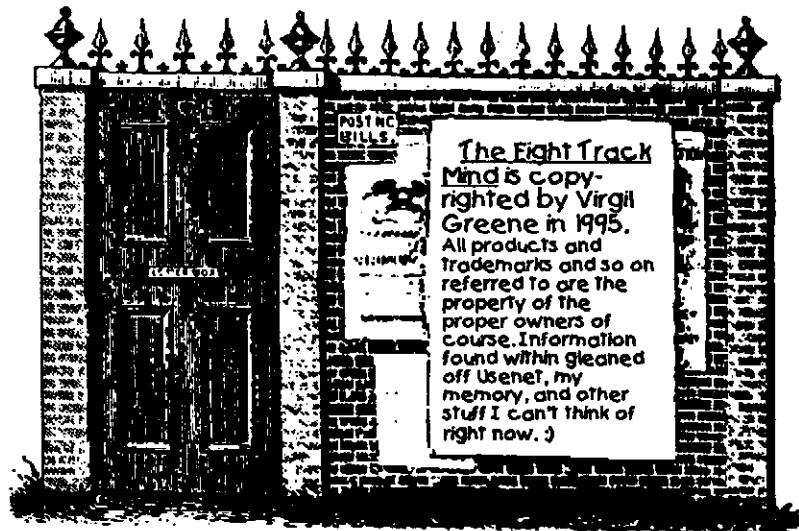
On Burnout: Perhaps if a game starts to feel "stale" one should step back for a bit rather than stop altogether. Depends, of course.

On Trek Generations: The more I think about this film the more I have to admit just how bad it really is. Kirk really should have died in space, not by a fall.

On Pendragon: Ulprus has thrived, but he nearly died a couple of times. Part of that is that like most of my characters he's actually kind of weak. But he's lucky. :)

NEXT ISSUE STUFF

Ummm, maybe I'll write about all the stuff I said I'd write about in the past. :) Hopefully I can work up an overview of SFTV and an overview of the M:tG expansions.



Strange Sands

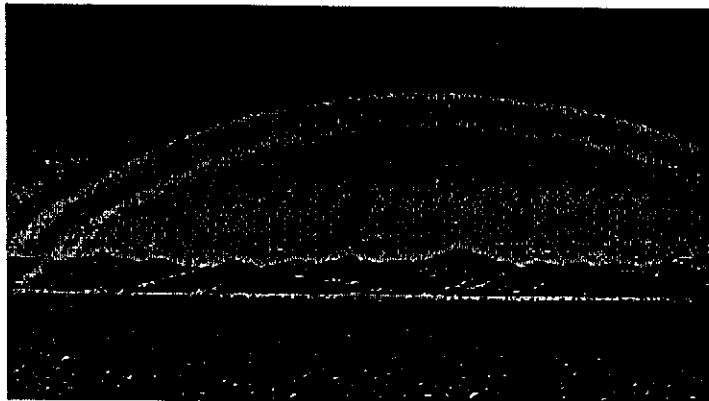
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Well, January passed and before I knew it, the *Interregnum* deadline was upon me, and I never got an issue of Strange Sands written. I guess I was burned out. :) It was good to read other people's comments on the subject, though, and it's nice to see new people (Hi Chris, Jenny and Tara! And good to see you again, Mr. Sabalauskas.)

Burnout Redux

After reading Chris Aylott's experiences with burnout, I found myself saying, "hey, he's describing *me!*" I know all too well what you mean when you talk about the irresistible urge to run the epic campaign.

Sometimes I think epic campaigns have as many things going against them as for them. You've got players who don't care about your beautifully crafted plot and would rather be out being highway bandits, you've got the long wait before the payoff, and, of course, you've got simple real-world exhaustion. It's hard to pull it off. And yet, nothing is more satisfying than a long-running epic. I'm currently trying a mixed approach. That is, setting out the



globe-spanning parameters of the campaign, but letting the players do what they will in between major milestones. That way, players can do some of the swashbuckling stuff and every so often come back to the moral obligation to Save The World—or at least throw in their two cents worth. I know in the past that I get caught up in the epic story to the exclusion of all else. What I've found is that it's really fun to take small side trips that *may* be tied to the principal campaign, but also may have nothing to do with it whatsoever. The trick is to not feel as if you have to stick to the main storyline.

Sometimes I think the most difficult thing for a GM to do is be sensitive to what his or her players want, and going with it.

Love, or Weird Moments in Roleplaying

The first time we encountered romance in a game was back in our late AD&D roleplaying period. We'd just started the *Dragonlance*

series and decided to use the pre-generated characters that came with the modules, and for the first time ever, we had characters with romantic interests. This was especially interesting because all our players were male, and all of us were at that adolescent point where we were more interested in roleplaying than in women, or at least that's what it seemed. So it was funny to see players' reaction when a female NPC approached one of the PCs romantically. Looking back, it was as convincing as a scene in a movie or book, and it was interesting to see that when the NPC presented herself in a way that was romantic as opposed to sexual, the roleplaying almost came naturally. Maybe our group was more ready for women than we thought. :)

Some of our most memorable moments have come when we played out interactions between characters within the context of the current adventure, but actually managed to reach that subtle area where each character's own hopes and fears could be voiced to one other. At one point in the *Dragonlance* campaign, the original party, which had lived through the first four adventures, was forced to split into two groups to pursue separate goals. Two of the characters, who had been together for some time, had to split up as well. We later had a chance to roleplay the effects of that split-up, and all the things you might expect—fear that the other might be dead, anger that he wasn't there to help, worry when things were looking bleak—surfaced. Frankly, I was surprised the players tuned into that, but again, I think it's that zen-like state you can reach sometimes with a group of people you've played with for a long period. At the time, we may have been one of the most closely-knit gaming groups in our town.



Ham is the medieval horror campaign we're currently playing. It is a fairly "realistic" fantasy setting, where dark things lurk below the seemingly mundane medieval existence. We are using RuneQuest combat and a modified version of the Harnic magic system.

Harnic Update

When we last left off, our four characters, Lady Alaina, Sir Brutus, Durgin and Quindlen, had reached the small, burned-out village of Chewinton, deep in the south of Kaldor. A diseased villager had stumbled into their Meminast, their own village, babbling about evil shadow things, and so they traveled south to see if there was anyone else that could be rescued.

Chewinton seemed empty, but Durgin went ahead and searched the outlying cottages, while the rest of the group approached the manor house. The manor gates themselves were locked, but Quindlen used rope to scale the wooden palisades and walked through the empty courtyard to let Alaina and Brutus inside. There were signs of a struggle in the courtyard, but no living folk. The smell of rotting flesh was apparent, however, and everyone covered their mouths to avoid

disease. A search of the manorhouse turned up several bodies—one a horse in the stables, but others clearly household servants. Strangely enough, not all of them had died of disease. One of the servants, a plump cook, was found in a wrecked kitchen—her throat slit, after what looked like a struggle. The most bizarre scene, however, was in the main hall. A group of servants had been lined up against the wall, and lay dead, impaled with arrows. On the opposite side of the room lay the archers—also dead, their wrists slit, evidently by their own hand; bloody daggers lay nearby.

Meanwhile, in one of the cottages, Durgin found someone. Inside, a young woman knelt beside a boy, who had died of the disease. She

was catatonic, but after he got closer, Durgin could see that her dirty light green vestments marked her as a Peonian healer. He tried to bring her outside, but the minute he opened the door to the cottage, she seemed to have some sort of horrible vision, and she screamed.

The other group was unable to help, however, because they were being attacked. The search in the great hall had been disrupted when the mad, diseased lord of the house burst in from one of back the rooms, fully armed. Brutus, Quindlen and Alaina managed to cut him down, but not before he'd given Brutus a nasty leg wound.

The outburst was strange, in that the lord — who Lady Alaina knew as Lord Sulder — was reknowned for being a clearheaded man, well capable of protecting his subjects from the tribesmen to the south. That he should fall to insanity was something of a shock. The note found in the back room, written in an unsteady hand was another revelation:

"The strangers died last night, and my heart is cold. Their faces wore strange smiles, as if they knew what would meet them in the afterlife. That they spoke with nearly every person in the village tells me their purpose was to lead us to the same place they have now gone. I can only try to keep the people within the confines of our home, but already I begin to feel hot with fever, and strange visions enter my sight. I know what I must do. May Peoni have mercy upon me."

By then Durgin had managed to calm the priestess down, but she still could not talk. They rejoined the rest of the group as they bound Brutus' leg. Several guesses were made about the deaths: the suicides were obviously an attempt to keep the disease from spreading, but a search for the three 'strangers' turned up nothing. The rest of the manorhouse was largely deserted.

It was getting late, and Alaina wanted leave before nightfall. But there was still the business of searching the small keep. Inside, they found the remains of a servant, dead of the plague, but as they entered the basement they heard voices. Downstairs they found three starving prisoners in the dungeon. They claimed to have been jailed for poaching, but knew nothing of the disease, only that they hadn't been fed in the last three days. Against better judgment, she let Lopo, Geshel and Num loose.

Quindlen managed to break into the armory, where they found a number of weapons and a good suit of armor. Alaina and Durgin were more interested in the village records, however, and they came away with Lord Sulder's books, as well as a small heavy lockbox that they didn't have time to open.

The sun was just setting when they made it outside. They were preparing the horses when they heard the sound of distant hooves to the south. Quindlen and Brutus climbed the palisade and looked down the road. Six riders wearing black cloaks slowed to a trot as they entered the village.



Interregnum #9 & #10

The Log That Flies

I enjoyed reading the background on Wonder. It reminds me a little of a book I read when I was younger called *The Magical Land of Noom*. It was about a brother and sister who build a spaceship out of wooden planks and end up on the dark side of the moon (noom/moon, get it?). They land in a forest of giant mushrooms which upon tasting, taste like cake. It gets stranger from there... :)

After hearing about *Factsheet 5*, and indeed, reading some of the posts on the net, I wouldn't worry too much about being "blessed" with this review. Seems other people don't pay them much attention, either.

I was happy to see that the Sampler disappeared so quickly at Arisia. It looked good, and I think it was a good representation of the work people are doing. The review in *Shadis* seemed to confirmed the quality — everyone should give themselves a pat on the back! :)

Re: The postal worker. Seems complaining can actually have an effect -- let's just hope he doesn't have access to an assault rifle.

Re: Ham. I suppose it could be easy to descend into an overly convoluted plotline, but I tend to focus on the immediate environment. My principal goal in any game is to have fun — the Hamic background is detailed, but the PCs will rarely have to worry about it unless it affects them — they're not historians. :)

Rich Staats

Another hilarious set of characters and background, especially Qwerty's lethal new brain. Riotous applause! :)

Session Notes

I liked the way you handled the resurrection in the C&S campaign, even though it may have not been the ideal. Sometimes a plot "mistake" can result in some very interesting sidetrips. My morbid curiosity is up. Were the ritual victims willing sacrifices? I'd be interested to hear more about that particular incident. :)

I don't know how I forgot to mention it, but the Peter Weir movie, *Fearless* is an excellent example of the way a character can change after "dying."

I've always wanted to try books on tape, but never managed to get enthusiastic enough to go out and buy a copy. I remember hearing *Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars* and *The Restaurant at the End of the Universe* on PBS and enjoying them, so I don't know why I have such difficulty now. *Neuromancer*

is on the list of must-reads, too.

Refuges

Chapter five (in IR #9) filled in many of the gaps re: your story world, and it was nice to see how much thought you've put into it. I especially liked the way you wove information into the council's conversation without doing a massive Info Dump.

It was nice to see Pyrmn in chapter four (in IR #10), but if I hadn't read Vernor Vinge's *A Fire Upon the Deep* recently, I think I would have been completely lost by chapter five. You've got an interesting background, but I think it will probably overwhelm most readers. If I had just picked it up, I'd think it was a completely different story. The "huh?" reaction is strong because the new element is brought in so late in the story line. You've prepared us for a straight fantasy story, but the SF element isn't even hinted at, so when you pull the rabbit out of the hat, you're jarring us too much. I like what you're trying to do — I just need a bit more preparation.

Who Is John Galt?

Now that *Lords of Chaos* has finally seen the light of day, I will pick up my copy as soon as I'm unbroke. :) RQ Adventures sounds interesting as well — thanks for keeping us posted on the RQ world.

Re: AD&D Resurrection. Perhaps you could add a couple points to your resurrected PC's stats as well, just to show the many faceted benefits of dying. :)

Ah, yes, the G-series. There was something about those old dungeons that still warm the cockles. The new ones are too slick — old AD&D modules are kind of like listening to *Stairway to Heaven*; you want to hear the crackles on the LP. :)

The Eight Track Mind

Enjoyed your takes on the different types of resurrection. I was wondering, however, when Karma would visit Nordax and Eldnor in the "Abandoned" scenario. I have a little trouble with the PC-that-looks-just-like-the-one-who-just-died bit. If it were a ghost or revenant, however, it could be lots of fun.

Also liked reading your thoughts on *Arena* and *Generations*. It's been tough to find a really good fantasy novel recently, although some of Jack Vance's stuff is extremely good. I have trouble even looking at novels based on RPGs or card games. *Generations* wasn't great, but it wasn't horrid either (unlike V). There are some good bits that make it worth the \$7 entry fee, even though there are a number of, as you pointed out, logic holes.

Aye, Matey

Re: Mokshe the Mercenary. Perhaps they could use some of the extra parts for little tasks like testing for traps. They could throw an arm or something down the next 10' of corridor, and use pieces of hair for tying arrows together or for kindling. Messy, maybe, but useful. :)

The Careless Gaming Swabs' Guide to Boston was a fine exposé on Boston's gaming mecca. I'd probably go with Pandemonium for RPGs and the Strategist for board games. Funny that an SF book store has one of the more complete RPG collections in Boston.

Peaceable Demeanor

Well, it's the GM's responsibility to make sure everyone has a chance to get their actions/roleplaying in. If you're playing an especially vocal character, he or she will just have to make that much more extra effort to make sure everyone gets equal time. It may be frustrating for the player who wants to do everything, but that's something players must learn if they are interested in the group effort of roleplaying. At the same time, it may never work to mix players who are especially shy or easily intimidated with vocal, passionate players. The luck of the mix may have as much to do with a successful campaign than anything else.

Softly, Softly

Hello Jenny and Tara! Glad to have you here — it's nice to have a couple sensible people across the Atlantic to keep us in line. :)

I've played with a number of groups, and unfortunately most of them tended to be dominated by males, too. Even so, the few times we did game with females, they've been some of the best players. My two cousins played an AD&D session with us once, and they were surprised at how much fun they had. In general, though, I think more groups are trying to form mixed groups of players and de-emphasize the mindless chest beating and hack and slashing of the early RPG days.

Was interested to hear, Jenny, about your involvement with Intersector and SF in general. I recently picked up fantasy again after putting Tad William's *The Dragonbone Chair* down in disgust a couple years ago. I'm now reading Ian Lee's *Night's Master*, which is quite good, but wondered if you know of any good recent fantasy authors. I'm trying really hard to avoid the shlocky stuff. Thanks for your warning about MagicNet and the review of *Brothers to Dragons, Companion to Owls*. I'll look for the Salman Rushdie books.

Tara, you might be interested in hearing about Avalon, the game David Hoberman, author of "The

Skeleton Key recently tried, where each character took on an intelligent version of various animals. I believe one was a badger. In any case, it was a semi-medieval society, with a good deal of action and intrigue. It sounded fun.

The Parliament of Dreams

Welcome to *Interregnum*, Chris! Seems we're hearing from more great people all the time. It will be good to hear from another Babylon 5 aficionado.

Some people love political intrigue; others would rather eat raw liver before being forced to play in a campaign that is based on it. I think that as long as it's something "out there" that's causing more immediate and tangible problems (i.e. mysterious riders coming to burn down your village) it's okay, but I've always had difficulty getting players to stand around in council chambers trying to figure out who's backstabbing who. Again, it may be a matter of taste.

Re: game store stuff. I dreamt of owning a game store when I was in college, so here's my own little list which you can ignore as desired:

A nice gaming area, perhaps in the back. This was the one thing that originally got me into gaming. It was sort of an open table, so anyone walking into the store could join. You can use it for Magic tournaments, an open "one shot" RPG or a *Star Fleet Battles* tournament.

A broad selection of roleplaying games. Yes, TSR, of course, but make sure you have Chaosium, West End, FASA Task Force and some of the other new game companies in stock. Check out a copy of Lawrence Schick's *Heroic Worlds* for a rundown of some of the better games.

The more atmosphere you can provide, the better. It's a tricky thing to accomplish, because it's somewhat subjective, but in general, the more comfortable you feel when you walk in, the more likely you'll stick around to buy something. Things like music and lighting can be a major factor. I always thought it would be fun to create sort of a "dungeon" feel, with castle-style walls and "torches," but I know this can be a major expense.

Above all, don't pounce on customers the second they walk in. That's the one thing that gets me out of the store real fast.

Tales from the Electric Underground

Enjoyed reading your thoughts on the Star Wars cards. I used to collect them a long time ago, but finally traded them off. I remember when I first bought Ralph McQuarrie's Star Wars Sketchbook, and being so impressed that I went out and traced one of the X-Wing sketches for a T-shirt silkscreen. It's interesting to note that Lucas originally planned

Strange Sands

to have scenes in the Empire's capital. Friends and I thought, after being disappointed by the third movie, that the Imperial homeworld would have been a better setting than the Ewok's planet.

It sounds as if the Star Wars comics have improved immensely since I last looked at one. It was back in ancient days after the first movie when they first came out with the series. When Luke Skywalker looked more like a refugee from *Saturday Night Fever* than Mark Hamill, I gave up on them. Maybe I'll stroll by the local comic shop tomorrow. :)

Re: The price of RPG stuff. I use a simple rule: buy only what I'm going to actually use. :)

Enjoyed the short fiction. This sounds like it may have come from *Torg*. Am I right?

The Pen and Sword

Good to see you back, Mark! I suppose running for office could take some time, but a simple hard drive crash? Really. :)

Enjoyed your review of Generations, and I agree with it, even though I managed to have a fun time watching this movie. I guess I don't take Trek very seriously anymore, and it helps. Maybe we'll see Babylon 5 on the big screen.

Reading Companion 4 YH1

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Tales of Ralios

Synopsis: Konall, Minara, Una, Jornast, Harmast, and Aidin were initiated into the Belovaking clan. They crossed to the other side and with the aid of the Flint Slinger Left-Stone Shouter, passed many trials, so many that the priest Halvar Stormeye said that Orlanth had chosen them for a great fate. The thane, Ekel Field-Destroyer, took them on their first cattle raid, into Naskorion.

The thane's daughters attracted several suitors. Minara turned hers down. Una asked Nath Brawl to fetch her a horse, then set out to visit another suitor. They travelled through Kilwin, and were attacked by Galanini because they were riding horses. Una turned down Radgan the Whistler because he appeased the Galanini. While guesting with a farmer, they beat off a trollkin horde, but not before Harmast had his ear chewed off. Konall visited Fola Giver and Tailte, and decided to marry Fola. Nath Brawl returned with a Galanini pony and its rider's head, and Una married him.

A divination suggested that the birth of Una's first child could be helped by the troll goddess Xiola Umbar, so they headed for the lands of the Mokevogi clan, believed to worship her. After an altercation with the Olkoring clan, they arrived, to learn that the local spirit Soothing Touch was emphatically not a troll goddess, and couldn't help since her necklace had been stolen by Madur Great Valor, a Rune Lord of Orlanth. They travelled to Madur's stead, and asked him for the necklace. He gave it to them, and the Soothing Touch Childbirth Ritual was performed, which gave Nath Brawl the pains of childbirth.

Year 19 of Ekel Field-Destroyer (continued)

They decided to raid Naskorion. Just outside Wolnarhi lands, they were attacked by 3 wyverns. They killed two, and took their heads. Nath thought they were chaotic, so only Jornast was interested in the skins. He started skinning them, which enraged the third; it attacked again but was killed. They returned home so Minara's wounds could be tended. Jornast asked his father to make armor and boots, and Harmast asked for a scabbard.

They returned to Naskori lands. Jornast and Konall scouted ahead, and found 30 cows guarded by 4 men and 2 dogs. Everyone returned that night. One of the guards conjured up light, but the herders were killed easily. The dogs tried to keep the cattle at the camp, and were killed despite protests from Una and Konall, who felt the dogs may have been able to help them herd the cattle, with a little training.

The cattle were difficult to move quickly (probably because they were used to being herded by dogs), and 11 horsemen caught up. Harmast set up a wedge formation, with Minara's chariot at the front. Although Minara took out one lancer, and her charioteer took down another's horse, she took a serious wound. Jornast killed one horse, and fought from his chariot despite being barely able to control it. They finally managed to kill all the soldiers. Minara's wound proved beyond their ability to heal, and she died. Una mourned her sister, and they hung all the heads on her chariot.

When they returned, Ekel Field-Destroyer gave everyone their pick of the Naskori chargers, and a silver bracelet.

Una gave birth to a healthy boy, much to Nath's relief.

Jornast asked Ekel for a driver, gifting the boy's family with a charger.

Year 20 of Ekel Field-Destroyer

Although Ekel Field-Destroyer was still very much in power, there was some talk in the Belovaking clan about a possible successor as thane. Darstal was quietly mentioning his father, Egan Big-Blade, as the next thane. He pointed out that Ingkel Hundred-Fighter's bloodline could forever lose eligibility if a member didn't become thane, a fact which wasn't lost on Harmast (who's from that lineage). Ekel's oldest son Alabron was also interested in becoming thane, and promised

This is the writeup of my campaign set in the East Ralios area of Glorantha. I use PenDragon Pass rules because they play quickly, and encourage a multi-generation campaign.

It's an open question whether Soothing Touch (worshipped by the Mokevogi) and Xiola Umbar (worshipped by trolls) is the same. I think the players think they are, and since they have the same spells, it probably doesn't matter — except to the Mokevogi.

Nath, an initiate of Urox the Storm Bull, fumbled his Sense Chaos skill

The Naskori are the sorcery-using people to the west, natural enemies of the Orlanthi.



Candidates for election to thane must be related within four generations to a previous thane.

Reading Companion 4

to reward his early supporters.

Trannsi of the Roseberry clan of the Alekki made his way to the hillfort. His mother's brother had married the sister of Konall's foster father. Trannsi had been hunting in Vustria with two clan brothers, and had discovered a rune-carved plinth when they were attacked by Telmori. He was saved by a whirlwind that formed around the plinth, and tossed Telmori and their wolves around. Since this was powerful Air magic, he headed for Konall, the only Orlanthi he knew. Konall and his kin agreed to help avenge Trannsi's clan brothers and investigate the plinth.

As they passed through Melvori clan lands, they were met by a group of warriors. One was Kuan, who recognized the kinsmen of Una, whom he'd sworn to marry. When Nath Brawl said that she was his wife, Kuan challenged him. They dealt each other two mighty blows, then Kuan gave Nath a deep wound in the side. Since his own men were evenly matched by Nath's friends, Kuan decided not to take Nath's head, but refused to let them cross Melvori territory.

Nath was too embarrassed to return to Una for his wounds to be treated, so they found a healer at a stead of the Kiftori clan. The Kiftori were curious about the "shaggy man" travelling with the Orlanthi.

Trannsi was able to find the site where he was attacked. A tree had fallen, exposing an opening under its roots. The plinth was taller than Harmast, and carved with many runes as well as other symbols.

A huge, grey slug came oozing towards them. Nath tried to become inspired by Hate Chaos but became Melancholic. They killed the slug with missiles, but not before it spit slime at Jornast.

They dragged the tree back over the hole and camped. That night, four Telmori stole Jornast's horse, but were discovered. Two got away, but their wolves didn't, and Trannsi skinned them.

They returned to the Kiftori for Konall to heal, gifting them with the wolf skins. They were joined by Ort, a Humathi from the Karbaring clan. They showed a rubbing from the plinth to the Kiftori lawspeaker, who claimed the writing was ancient Naskori.

They returned to the site. Ort scrambled down into an underground chamber, and was attacked by a two-headed broo. Since the opening was narrow, only a few people could get into the fight, and the broo gave Ort several nasty wounds before being dispatched. They tried to continue into the next underground chamber, but were unable to cross a large pool of slime, which oozed up over anything they touched it with. Harmast collected some of it.

Twelve Telmori and wolves showed up, and they decided to leave the plinth to them. The Telmori set up camp. A couple hours later, three more Telmori arrived, supporting a shaman who limped painfully. The shaman began some sort of ritual drumming.

They decided to leave, but soon ran into 10 Galanini. Nath and Konall negotiated for their help against the Telmori. The horse people were no friends of the Telmori, but asked for two horses in payment, and reiterated the Code of Galanin, that only the horse's kin could ride. Konall finally decided not to accept their offer, since he wanted to be able to ride into battle (despite being more skilled fighting from foot with his craisech).

Frustrated by the Telmori, they decided to raid the Melvori herds. They were able to find 44 cows and killed two of the herd boys. Hours later, 8 Melvori chariots caught up. Although they were disappointed that Kuan was not among them, they managed to defeat them all. Jornast challenged the last one to single combat. Hostaran, the Melvori

David Dunham

The Alekki are the moose hsunchen. Vustria is not known for good hunting, but Trannsi's clan brothers had been exiled and had little choice.

Telmori are the "werewolf people," worshippers of the wolf totem cursed to become wolves once a week, at full moon.

Kuan of the Melvori was last seen in Reading Companion 2.

Nath earned a Love Wife check for this battle.

In other words, the Alekki.

In Pendragon, you can become inspired to great feats by a passion. I've decided to reduce the benefits of a Hate passion, since everyone seems to have at least one, and because I think it should be better to be inspired by Love rather than Hate.

Note that the Orlanthi are illiterate; the lawspeaker, despite being a Lankoring [Lhankor Mhy, the Knowing God] initiate, may have been making this up.

Broos are creatures of chaos, and often have unusual chaotic features such as a second head.

Everyone else was disgusted at Harmast's bag of slime.

The Galanini are the horse hsunchen, who don't allow anyone else to ride their kin. The Belovaking clan members have had trouble with them before.

warrior, struck first with a terrific blow, and was allowed to leave in Jornast's chariot. They ended up with 15 ponies, 5 chariots, and 7 heads, in addition to the cows.

Shortly after their return, rumors began reaching the Belovaking of a group of strange people who claimed to have crossed the Rockwood Mountains, and were slowly heading down the Doskior. Nobody had crossed the mountains since before Ingkel Hundred-Fighter became thane, over 60 years ago, after High Llama Pass mysteriously closed.

This is the first clue to the actual year of the game.

Comments on #9

Virgil Green The fatality rate in my PenDragon Pass games has been relatively low (except for one player, who tends to play valorous but reckless characters — yes, he played Minara). As compared to Arthurian Pendragon, there tends to be less armor, but there's healing magic. The big change I made in the rules was to allow a free stat gain each year, in part to counteract player complaints about major wounds gradually crippling characters.

Douglas Jorenby I bought 2nd edition Star Wars, and was disappointed. It seemed like they'd added complexity to the game, and made the presentation a bit more rules-heavy. It's still a nice, simple system — and not liking a background has never stopped me from using a game. I used Star Wars for my "12 Worlds" campaign (which I think I only managed to run an abortive PBModem, an initial face-to-face, and a convention scenario).

Peter Maranci re resurrection: While it's not the psychological trauma you expect, my RuneQuest characters who've been resurrected have been somewhat traumatized by the physical degeneration that comes from resurrection (especially when it's delayed by a few days). ☺ Hmm, I always thought Greg Costikyan did a great job writing the Star Wars game. It seemed like a serious attempt to interest non-gamers in the hobby. ☺ There have been so many solo games that I doubt the format is copyrighted — if it even could be. ☺ There are no official Gloranthan spells to prevent childbirth. Una's player said she was trying not to become pregnant, but I figure no such precautions are foolproof (even modern implants don't always work), so I had her roll with a substantial modifier. I've always seen Uleria (Gloranthan goddess of love) as more Fertility related, and as such not possessing life-preventing spells. The official writeup of Uleria [Different Worlds 38] has no such spells, and infertility is mentioned as a curse.

Gilbert Pili The "seasonal colds" were probably a mild curse from Soothing Touch. Note that I'm being vague about her — is she the same as Xiola Umbar? Did she curse Madur Great Valor and his household? — because I like a game where there aren't always straightforward answers.

Resurrection

Oddly enough, when Minara died (see "Tales of Ralios" above), the question of resurrection never came up. I don't know if this was because the players were used to a low-level campaign (one GM has the reputation of being very stingy with magical treasures), because it had been so long ago that anyone had been killed where resurrection was possible, the fatalism of Minara's player, or what. As GM, I'm probably at fault — Minara's father Ekel Field-Destroyer is certainly important enough that he could have had her resurrected at a Chalana Arroy temple.

RQ Con 2

I had a great time at the con. This year, I decided to bring a costume for the LARP. Unfortunately, I didn't learn which character I was really playing until a few days before I left, but my wife was able to sew me a great costume for my role as Gaiseron the Mystic, Ecclesiarch of the Hrestoli Church. The hat we put together was the tallest in the game, and topped by what one person called a "throbbing brain."

I ran "Horses of the Sun," my Grazer scenario, introducing more people to my PenDragon Pass variant (including Steve Perrin, main author of RuneQuest).

Internet

I now have full Internet access, and am wasting a certain amount of time surfing the Net — and reading newsgroups. *Interregnum* offers a somewhat different outlet, though once the Net becomes more media-rich, much of the advantage will go away.

I can't wait to set up a real site on the Net and create a World Wide Web page (my Internet provider doesn't make this easy with my current account).

1995. February
March /Kren

True Magick

#1

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All right, just who the hell is this guy?

A fair question. I'm 36 years old, single, and work for one of those wholesale shopping clubs that seem to be ubiquitous these days. I have a degree in economics from Michigan State University that I've mostly wasted. When I'm not working or gaming my hobbies include computers, golf, alternative rock music, and reading.

My interest in SF, fantasy, and gaming goes back as long as I can remember, but it wasn't until my senior year in college (1979) that games began to take over my life. That year I discovered both wargames and RPGs, embarking on an addiction that, more than 15 years later, shows no sign of abating.

In those days RPGs consisted pretty much of *D&D* in its various permutations. I started with *AD&D* and it's still the system I play most often, unlike most of you out there in IR land. While I am no fan of TSR, I've invested too much time, energy, and money in my campaign (it's run more or less continuously since March, 1981) to abandon their mutant offspring. Besides, with creative players there is plenty of opportunity for "deep" roleplaying even in *AD&D*. And anyway, my players are a rather conservative lot and half of them would probably desert if I switched game systems. C'est la vie.

Over the years I have also GM'd *Twilight 2000*, *Paranoia*, and (my personal favorite) *Call of Cthulhu*. A recent release that I find enormously intriguing is Phage Press' *Amber* "diceless" role-playing system, in part because I'm a Zelazny fan but also because of the game's unique nature. I'd like to try playing a character before I give GMing it a go, but my work schedule doesn't allow me to take up another gaming project on any kind of a regular basis, so for now I'm out of luck.

So that's where I'm coming from.

The password is...Love

If it's February the topic must be love. Ah, Valentine's Day, that holiday most beloved of confectioners, greeting card purveyors, and dentists everywhere...an ideal time to explore the topic of love in RPGs.

Romances between PCs and NPCs are grist for the clever GM's mill. If you can't mine this area for plot hooks, it's time to let somebody else be GM for awhile. From the simple expedient of putting a PC's loved one in danger, to a full-blown love triangle involving deception, betrayal and secrets behind the facade of nobility, romance is fertile ground for storytelling.

Love, of course, is the most powerful of human emotions. As such, it is easy for players to get a handle on, for their characters if not for themselves. Most of us have been in love at some time in our lives (the lucky ones, of course, are still in love...). It is a universal experience, so even the most reluctant of roleplayers can usually be drawn out by involving his character in an affair. Then, once the fish is hooked, the GM can begin to draw the hapless PC in. And the fun really begins.

In almost 14 years of play, encompassing 30 years of game time, my campaign has seen numerous love affairs involving the PCs. Some are as basic as the wandering ranger with a different lady in every town. Others are more intense, such as the noble-born elf who was pushed into an arranged marriage only to learn that he truly loved his wife; I still have notes on file from this player, telling me how much "Rain Mist" pined for Ghilda and couldn't wait to see her and their children again. In passing, I note that the player of this character was gay; it's not particularly important, but I think that it's an interesting aside.

Another memorable relationship in this campaign

involves the druid/ranger Ned Jones and his wife Tia. She was the chief apprentice to an evil wizard, created (along with her peers) simply to be an amusing encounter while the PCs raided his base. Well, Ned charmed her with a spell. I was forced to develop the character on the fly, as Ned's fair and just treatment of her made her rethink her priorities. She remained even after the charm wore off.

Tia became a party member, since the group had not had a mage in some time. She was reluctant to talk about her past, which made another PC curious. He began to investigate, and it turned out that she was a fabulously wealthy princess who had thrown away her heritage in order to study magic. Ned was able to reconcile her with her family, and the two wed.

They make a powerful pair. I now treat Tiawen Cardolan Jones almost as one of my own PCs. Steve (Ned's player) and I would like to play Ned and Tia at a convention some day, just to see the other players' reaction to this husband and wife team.

There was also the cavalier Tostig Aerandir, who courted and won the illegitimate daughter of his patron. Castillia was acknowledged by her father, a powerful Duke in the kingdom of Dun's Stable, and so was quite a conquest for the dashing young warrior. It took much persuasion (and not a little questing) for Tostig to prove himself worthy of the young woman's hand. But this was a character brimming with self-confidence, and he managed to pull it off.

More recently, the current bunch of PC's, in two years of campaigning, has managed to experience quite a bit of romance. At one extreme we have a halfling thief who will sleep with anything with a pulse, as long as it might advance her career or her sense of fun. There is no romance involved with Narya, just cheap sex. I don't think anyone will be surprised to learn that her player is male.

On the other hand, there is the priest named Anwar. The party's putative leader, he is involved in building a long-distance romance with a female ranger. Their paths rarely cross, since she is often out scouting on the front lines of a Cold War that seems ready to become hot at any moment, so their relationship is developing very slowly. Anwar remains true while he awaits her return. He is very much a gentleman and a believer in "courtly love."

Another PC threw herself (almost literally) into an affair with the young king of the realm in which she grew up. Apparently, the player thought that Aislin had a good chance to become queen someday, in part because of the character's noble background (which must remain hidden for reasons I won't go into here). As far as the rest of the world knows, Aislin is a nondescript commoner.

Unfortunately, King Calvin's advisors have decided that it is time for the youthful monarch to wed, and

Scenes like this
can add a lot of
spice to a
roleplaying
session.



have arranged a marriage to an eligible princess from yet another kingdom. Calvin (who, by the way, is the son of a deceased PC) loves Aislin, but for the greater good of the kingdom has agreed to sacrifice that love and marry Joelle who, as the niece of the king of Bartelby, would be a better match for him than the "commoner" Aislin.

Well, Aislin hit the proverbial roof. Since Calvin broke off their relationship she has played the "Hell hath no fury" bit to the hilt. I have yet to figure out what the player hopes to accomplish by Aislin's unseemly behavior, but that's half the fun! Meanwhile, her actions are having consequences that she did not envision, leading the PC party into their current adventure. It's great when the course of true love doesn't run smoothly, don't you think?

The affair with the king, with all its ramifications, has come to define this character. Allison (the player) was new to roleplaying when she created Aislin. For many weeks, Aislin was a generic fighter, the type of PC one sees far too often in *AD&D* campaigns, until a chance encounter (one that I made up on the spot) sparked the player's interest. Suddenly, Allison was motivated to create a real background for her character (which I modified to suit my tastes). Now she is doing more roleplaying that "roll"-playing. Love does that to people, and to PC's as well.

Computer Game Reviews

Note: This first game was played using a 486SX/25 system with 8 meg of RAM, a double-speed CD-ROM drive and a Sound Blaster Pro card. All other games will be reviewed on my new system, a Pentium 90 with a similar setup, except for the sound card which is a 16-bit "Brand X" Sound Blaster clone. I'm running MS-DOS 6.2 and Windows 3.1.

Shadow of the Comet

By Infogrames and I-Motion, distributed by Interplay. An official *Call of Cthulhu* game.

This was the first CD-ROM game I bought, and it was one that I really wanted to like. As you might guess from the title of this 'zine, I'm a fan of *CoC*. I also greatly admired *Alone in the Dark*, Infogrames' earlier effort (worth playing, but avoid the lackluster sequel), so I had high hopes for *Shadow*. Alas, I was doomed to disappointment. While this is by no means a bad game, it should have been better.

The game takes place in 1910, in the small town of Illsmouth. The player takes the role of Jonathan Parker, a British journalist, who comes to Illsmouth to witness the passage of Halley's Comet, and to learn what really happened to one Lord Boleskine, who was at Illsmouth 76 years earlier and went insane because of what he found on the comet's last visit. Needless to say, Parker walks into a dark conspiracy and eventually must save the world.

Unlike SSI's "Gold Box" series of *AD&D* computer games, this is not a slavish translation of *CoC*. You will find no statistics for Parker or any of the folks he meets, and there is no real combat or character advancement. What the designers are aiming for here is atmosphere. They're trying to capture the spirit of a *Call of Cthulhu* adventure, and in that they have mostly succeeded. This is by far *Shadow*'s strongest point; with its strange characters, weird discoveries, and growing sense of menace looming overhead, this game feels like *CoC*. That's a major compliment.

Unfortunately, *Shadow* isn't much of a game. It turns out to be a standard computer adventure game, one that requires you to pick up everything that isn't nailed down and to be in the right place at the right time to solve the puzzles that the game presents. If you've missed something, or forgotten to talk to one of the NPCs, the game grinds to a halt until you

figure out what it is you've missed. There's also a horrendous maze for Parker to explore, and which he must escape with a particularly vile beastie chasing him; one false step means the monster kills him, and you have to start back at the beginning of the maze. I have never liked this sort of game. It's a shame that Infogrames couldn't come up with better gameplay for this title.

Shadow's strengths do overcome its weaknesses, and it is worth playing for the atmosphere, some decent voice acting, and the evocative sound effects. But it must go down as a missed opportunity. Grade: B-.

Master of Orion

By Simtex, published by MicroProse

Master of Magic, Simtex's follow-up to this game, has been discussed already in IR. I feel it only just that *MOO* (as we aficionados call it) should get its chance to appear in the spotlight. This much-honored title may be an even better game than *MoM*.

You play as one of ten races bent on conquering the galaxy. Starting from a single planet, you must expand your empire and fight off up to five computer controlled opponents to be named emperor and win the game. As each race has its own strengths and weaknesses, and the mix of opponents changes with each game, *MOO* is almost infinitely replayable. A strategy that wins with the technologically-adept but peaceable Psilons, for example, would fail miserably if attempted by the warlike Mrrshans. The challenge lies in finding ways to win with each of the ten races.

MOO is a time-stealer. One can sit down at the computer, play the game for what seems like a few minutes, then glance at the clock to find that three hours have passed. It's difficult to stop playing, because there's always some new discovery upcoming. The game's emphasis on long-range planning means that many turns can pass before your plans come to fruition, so be prepared for some long sessions.

A true classic. Grade: A.

That's enough for now. In the future I'll be looking at other products of interest to IR readers, like the *ST:TNG Interactive Technical Manual*, and Sir-Tech's *Star Trail*, among others.

Magic: The Opportunity

Let me tell you a story...

Once upon a time there was a little company called Tactical Studies Rules. Their main products were sets of rules for tabletop wargames using miniature figures. These made little or no impact on the gaming hobby of the era. The company might have died unnoticed were it not for a supplement tacked onto one of their rules sets, almost as an afterthought.

The game was called *Chainmail*, and it consisted of rules for conducting medieval-era battles. The rules themselves were not well-received, but the fantasy supplement aroused enormous interest. The game's author was a fan of swords and sorcery fiction. He included rules for adding the magic and larger-than-life heroes from this genre to the battles that were the main thrust of the game. Gamers demanded more of this. They got it, in a game that was called *Dungeons and Dragons*.

Of course, *D&D* became a phenomenon that not only changed the face of gaming, it created a whole new hobby. Thousands upon thousands of gamers gave the new roleplaying genre a try; many have stuck with it for years (and you know who you are). *D&D* spawned a host of competitors over the years, not a few of them better than the original (if not as successful).

It seems rather silly now, but there were those back in the early days of RPGs who predicted that the new genre would be the death of traditional board games, particularly wargames. In *The Winner's Guide to Board Games* (Playboy Press, 1979) Jon Freeman said that "*Dungeons and Dragons*...threaten(s) to make FRP games the tail that wags the wargaming dog." Other pundits were even more gloomy. Fantasy (and other) roleplaying games were going to destroy wargames.

Well, it didn't happen (except on a small scale when TSR destroyed SPI). Wargames have continued to sell, to the point where there are now as many companies producing wargames as this gamer has ever seen. It would appear that the prophesies were a bit off.

Fast-forward to the nineties. A small company called Wizards of the Coast develops a new game that is

radically different from what has so far been seen. It takes off like the proverbial rocket, with untold thousands of gamers flocking to its banner.

The new game is (as if you hadn't guessed) *Magic: The Gathering*. Once again, those in the game industry are claiming that the apocalypse is upon them, as millions of cards are sold for the new game. Dire predictions have again become the order of the day. *M:TG* will kill gaming, claim the doomsayers.

It all sounds very familiar, and it's as much hogwash now as it was then. In fact, *M:TG* may be the best thing that has happened to roleplaying and wargames in quite some time. And this comes from someone who has never played the darn thing!

What *M:TG* has done is bring lots of new blood into the hobby. In particular, there is an entire generation of children that grew up playing Sega and Nintendo games. Seduced by the pretty graphics and "cool" sounds, these kids waste hours of their lives playing the mindless offerings of the video game companies. *Magic* has done what no other current game has been able to accomplish: it has wooed a substantial number of kids away from their TV's and to the gaming table.

This represents a great opportunity for game publishers. When the excitement of *Magic* begins to wane, and burnout sets in, these players will be looking for other hobbies. Rather than crying about how *M:TG* has hurt their business, game publishers should be scrambling to create the "bridge" games; that is, the games that will ease the legions of recovering *Magic* addicts into RPGs and wargames. If any significant percentage of them can be converted into lifelong hobbyists, then *Magic: The Gathering* will have been an incalculable boon to the game industry.

Unfortunately, it seems that WoC's competition would rather try to steal their market. When TSR, for example, should be pitching their *First Quest* set to *Magic* players (it's a more than passable intro to *AD&D*), they instead are running full-page ads in *Dragon* inviting people to trade in 60 unwanted *M:TG* cards for a set of *Spellfire* cards. The short-sightedness of it all boggles the mind.

A great opportunity exists. Who will step forward?

Commentary

Because I have recently devoured the entire history of *IR*, I will be making comments here on subjects that were raised in a variety of issues. I'll try to keep my remarks brief, as I wish to finish this before I wear out my welcome.

The Log That Flies

Where do I begin? Your Bar Wars piece in #1 was on target, and much superior to a similar article that appeared in *Dragon* a couple of years ago. It's hard to believe that *White Wolf* couldn't use it.

As to your views on *Dragon's Lair*, I remember playing that one on my first computer, a Coleco Adam (Ouch! Did I really admit that?). I had some fun with it, but didn't like it enough to probe too deeply. BTW, there are many computer games out there that are worthy of attention. I suggest either of Simtex's "Master" games, published by MicroProse.

Some of the players in my *AD&D* campaign also play in a LARP group here in southern NH. From what I hear, it seems rather silly and pointless. I would like to try a well-run game of this sort, though

The Wonder campaign is most intriguing. I look forward to reading more as it develops.

Session Notes

I like your layout. Your clip art is always well-chosen; ditto your song quotes. You seem to be quite the eclectic person! Your enthusiasm for *CF* is rather contagious. I just might have to pick up a copy.

Re: board games. Have you tried *Merchant of Venus*? It's a fun, socially-oriented trading game that's just competitive enough to be interesting. It also sports an entertainingly inane background. The long setup time is its only drawback.

Refugee

Wow! Is there any genre you won't touch? Keep writing and eventually you must make a sale.

In the "Small World" Dept.: One of my *AD&D* players, Rick Mangekian, also plays in Ms. Stone's *Champions* campaign. I met Barbara at Con Man last year, when we ended up in the same *Cthulhu Now* scenario (our characters wound up in bed, but

that's another story). From what Rick tells me, it sounds like a fascinating game.

Who Is John Galt?

I don't play *RuneQuest* or *Magic: The Cash Cow*, so, unfortunately, I find myself skimming over much of the various issues of your zine. What I do read seems thoughtful and insightful, and your layout is most distinctive.

It's great to see another contributor to *IR* that actually plays *AD&D*. That's an interesting background for Thanos, especially since he's going through one of TSR's more hack-and-slash module series. Here's hoping your DM is creative enough to bring some good roleplaying to the adventures.

Long live Quadthulu!

The Parliament of Dreams

Ha! Here's someone even newer than you! I hope you (and the others) treat me gently.

Great way of kicking off a campaign. I must admit that I never would have thought of killing and then resurrecting the PC's before play even starts. It would certainly serve to get the players deeply involved in your story from the very beginning. If you are able to play it through the way you want to, be sure to let us know how it comes out.

Good luck with your bookstore. As a battle-scarred veteran of too many years in retail, I know what you are up against.

Softly, Softly

Congratulations on a most unique zine. It's good to have the British perspective in *IR*, and Tara is just the type of intelligent young person that our hobby must attract if it's going to grow. Good roleplaying knows no age or gender bounds; I've seen 30-plus adults who act more childishly than the average nine-year-old, and one of the best players in my group for many months was a 17-year-old girl. Meagan was at least six years younger than any other player (and some 20 years junior to our oldest player), but that didn't keep her from being accepted as an equal member of the party.

Good book reviews in your second issue.

Tales from the Electric Underground

Love the title! Your coverage of such things as comics, *Toon*, and the *Star Wars* RPG provides a welcome balance to the "heavier" stuff in *JR*. Being from the heartland of America (what John "Cougar" Mellencamp called "The Great Midwest" on his long-forgotten first album) gives you a voice and viewpoint unique in this APA.

I think that the most interesting aspect of your work here is your commentary as a Christian gamer. Having been exposed to much closed-minded righteous outrage from the deeply religious (my youngest sister is a born-again Christian; her husband is a minister), I find it refreshing to hear from one who is able to reconcile his faith with this hobby. While I don't always agree with what you write, I always enjoy reading it.

The prologue to issue 4 (in *JR* 10) was entertaining. Is it from a campaign, or is it original fiction? Is there more of it? Inquiring minds want to know...

The Pen and Sword

Well, it was a mighty long time between submissions. My condolences on the hard drive crash (a disaster which I've so far averted...now I've gone and jinxed myself) and the election loss. Better luck next time. I will refrain from asking for details as to the office, party affiliation, etc.

Your comments on *Star Trek: Generations* were mostly on target. I think I liked it a bit more than you did (I've certainly found many less pleasant ways to spend two hours), but you put your finger squarely on its flaws. Definitely too much Data, and not enough Malcolm McDowell. What you didn't mention was the series' tendency to blow up the Enterprise whenever things start to sag plotwise. Truly ludicrous, although it did result in the best FX sequence in the movie. Here's another vote for a real story in the second Next Generation feature.

Strange Sands

Missed you in *JR* 10. What's up with the *Harn* campaign? Keep us informed.

Your thoughts on resurrection in #8 were fascinating. That piece, as much as anything, got me interested enough to get involved with *JR*.

This is getting repetitious, but...great layout!

Skeleton Key, The Eight Track Mind, Aye Matey, Reading Companion

Your absence from *JR* 10 was keenly felt, all of you. You illustrate the range of contributors, the sheer diversity, that makes this APA so compelling. While I realize that producing a zine every month (particularly around the holidays) is a chore, it's still disappointing when one of the regulars misses an issue. Maybe the new schedule will help reduce the instances of AWOL contributors :)

I want to wrap this up soon, so for now I will refrain from commentary on your back issues. No slight is intended, and I plan to rectify the omission in future issues of this zine. *Mea culpa*.

Look to the Future

In upcoming installments, I will include book, movie, magazine, and game reviews. There will also be more tidbits from my *AD&D* campaign, as I try to prove that this venerable game and real roleplaying are not mutually exclusive. There will be more clip art. Finally, I intend to subject you to some fiction at some point, perhaps as soon as my next issue.

You have been warned.

Colophon

True Magick was written and formatted on a Pentium-90 PC (at least it didn't require the machine to perform abstruse division) using *PushButton Publish* Version 2.0, an amazingly inexpensive yet reasonably bearable DTP program. It was printed on a Canon BJ-200 ink jet printer, which isn't quite laser printing but is as close as my budget will allow.

The title is drawn from the writing of HP Lovecraft as filtered through Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* RPG. No offense is meant to either party, or to Theophilus Wenn, author of the book of the same title.

The opinions expressed are solely those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editor of *Interregnum*, nor those of any of its other contributors.

Frequent mention has been made of various trademarked products. No challenge to the holders of said trademarks is intended. Honest.

Thanks to Rick Mangekian for his suggestions.

Session Notes #25
E. Jaremky
S. Douglas



Lovers In A Dangerous Time

The match arced through the darkness like a shooting star before it sputtered out in the gutter. I could see the tip of his cigarette glowing dully, deep within the darkness of the doorway. The girl had sent him. Somehow I knew this with the same surety that I knew there would be no work tomorrow, or that the Tories would not be setting the words of the Regina Manifesto to music. He had a lot of moxie to follow me to Chinatown. A lot of moxie, or perhaps not so many brains. Either way, the time had come to put an end to it.

I turned slowly and walked directly to the doorway. "Gotta match?" I asked.

"Not for what you smoke," came the reply.

So. It was the girl who sent him. He obviously knew about my little vice....or at least one of them.

"I do smoke a bit of opium now and then....but at least I'm not in the habit of tailing people and lurking in doorways. You should be careful, friend. They don't like outsiders around here. They only just tolerate me, and that's taken years of work to accomplish."

"Funny you mention that," said the voice. A hand shot out and grabbed the lapels of my coat. I barely noticed the yellow tinge of the fingers that drew me in to the darkness. "You not tolerated, *wai guaren*, although some take your money for poppy. I come tell you that if you with Xi Shi again, you can ask your ancestors personally to explain what offense you have given."

*"These fragile bodies of touch and taste,
This vibrant skin, this hair like lace,
Spirits open to the thrust of grace,
Never a breath you could afford to waste...."*

Your sense of touch changes so radically, even the finest silk feels like electric current playing across your skin. I try to remember what it's like. Every time I go to Wang Fu's, I remind myself to

wai guaren = (white) foreign devil. Not a flattering appellation.

qi pao = traditional Chinese women's dress with a high neck, buttons angling off the shoulder, and a slit thigh.

renao = noisy, stimulating.

Mei you = "not have" (literally).

remember. Once I even wrote it on my hand, but then I forgot to look at my hand. It never works. She brushes against me, the lightest touch from her *qi pao*, and it shoots through my arm like the hot squat in the American gangster movies.

"Again, M'Kenzie? Xi too *renao* again?"

Her voice whispers like chimes in the distance, although I can feel the warmth of her breath against my ear. For a moment I drift with the sound and I'm sitting in the doorway of the scholar's retreat in an ancient garden. The temple chimes call me softly. I put down my brush and begin to reach for my scroll.

"Too soon go. You stay."

The birdlike touch on my shoulder is surprisingly firm, pressing me back into the couch. I feel the volts shoot through me once more, but this time they trail away into warm currents that sink deep into my muscles. I'm melting, oozing into the cracks in this ancient couch. I'm not even aware of my arm until I feel her pushing it back down.

"*Mei you*, M'Kenzie. You stay." Her fingers trail lightly across the stubble of my face as she drifts away on the sound of chimes.

The stem of the pipe is still in my hand. Gripping it, I drift away on the warm waves of the South China Sea.

Funny that I've never noticed it before, how much the stem of a pipe looks like the barrel of a gun. I grip the long stem firmly, rotating it between my fingers. The end remains the same: a round, black void defined by a hard edge. My entire life could be sucked into that dark emptiness. Or come spilling out of it.

Whatever.

Life is arbitrary, like that. Wang Fu says that seagulls don't become white by washing themselves every day, and crows don't become black by dipping themselves in ink every day. By that, I think he means that each is part of the natural order, and that it really doesn't mean anything that a given bird is a gull or a crow.

Then again, it may all be a way of making fun of me as *wai guaren*.

I don't really care, because I have glimpsed a truth much more profound than Wang's ancient shibboleths. There is black. There is white. They are both part of nature, but that's not to say that they have no meaning.

Black is the small lump of resin that Wang sells me when I come to visit him: the small, dark lump that symbolizes and embodies all the mystery of the universe. I sniff it carefully before I place it lovingly in the bowl of the pipe. Before I light the match, I lovingly lick the bitter residue from my fingers. The beauty is such that it brings tears to my eyes. For all their maddening love of ritual, few of the Chinese at Wang Fu's appreciate my sense of ceremony. They fill their pipes and begin to puff away. For me, though, it is like the adoration of a mistress -- the foreplay that must precede the act of love. To hurry through the preparations would be an insult to my beautiful mistress.

White follows black, as in the ancient Chinese symbol on the wall. As I puff slowly on the aromatic smoke from the pipe, the light from the magic lantern begins to throb and expand. After several puffs, streaks of white light shoot across my field of vision. Sometimes I catch a glimpse of the girl, radiant in her *qi pao*. She looks like an angel, a being of pure light. By the time there is no more resin in the bowl, the brightness has grown so that it fills all I can see.

And after all is white, it becomes black once more. Not the blackness of the cramps and trembling -- that will come much later -- but the blissful blackness of obliteration. The world is gone, and for a few blessed moments, I am as well. How could anyone say this is arbitrary, this is meaningless? This seems the most precious gift any man could hope to receive.

*"One day you're waiting for the sky to fall,
And next you're dazzled by the beauty of it all...."*

I am meditating quietly in the garden when she comes to me.

She moves as silently as a cloud. I have no doubt that if I opened my eyes, she would leave no trail to follow. It is the same thing that betrays her as all the other times before: the scent. There is only one other among the 10,000 things that shares the blessed scent.

I wait until I feel her hands brushing lightly across my shoulders, the warmth of her fragile body pressed against the hard expanse of my back. She is like water, changing to accommodate any container.

"Can't you see I am meditating?"

"But Mac-zi....you promise...."

The temptation is to give her a lecture on patience, on the necessity of acting in the proper moment, but the scent that clings to her embraces me more firmly than her arms. Before I know it, I have pulled her across my legs, not bothering to shift from my meditation position. Her silky black hair is the perfect handle by which to pull her lips to mine. I kiss her, deeply. The moist darkness of her mouth falls open and I draw her into me, as if I could inhale every bit of her mysterious essence.

She has unbuttoned the first few buttons of her *qi pao*. I can see the golden lustre of her skin peering from beneath the silk of the gown. Supporting her with my right arm, I pull her back to my lips. My left hand slips between us and fumbles at the first remaining button. The silk is slippery and my fingers are damp with anticipation. They slip, and slip again.

"Damn!"

Am I the sort of man to be defeated by something as plebeian as buttons that are too small and too slippery? Of course not! My hand grasps the loose edge of the dress and pulls. There is a moment's hesitation before the buttons begin to pop and bounce against my chest. The front panel of her *qi pao* falls away as I roll her on to her back, there in the garden.

I can't remember quite when it was that she brought me home. The hypocrites back in Toronto would say that was caused by the smoke. I say it was destiny in a form those self-serving Anglicans could never

understand. The thing was, the girl was madly in love with me. I could tell, although she had to be careful. There were eyes everywhere: Wang Fu, her extended family, all the other Chinese who might hate each other 99% of the time but would join ranks instantly if one of their own socialized with the *wai guaren*.

Still, the signs were clear to me. The way she touched me so softly as I drifted with the smoke dreams; it was as if her soul was part of mine, as if we were sharing a dream that neither of us wished to wake from. I knew that the soft chime of her voice in my ear was for me alone. For the rest of Wang Fu's customers she had a high, shrill voice. I could hardly believe it was the same angel of light who moved in my dreams. The only surprise was that she resisted her destiny as long as she did.

Ah, part of it does come back to me! Not the date -- that's not important -- but the celebration. My brother had sent me some money from back East, probably to buy off his guilt so he could ignore me with a clear conscience for another year.

Whatever.

Anyway, I decided this was a sign of good fortune. If there's one thing I have learned in my time among the orientals, it's that the gods take offense at those who fail to celebrate their good fortune. This is something that most *wai guaren* never grasp. Stuffing the wrinkled bills into my pocket, I rushed the few blocks from my hotel room to Chinatown. The sooner I could discharge my divine obligation, the better.

Wang Fu seemed hesitant when I requested two balls. I repeated my request, holding up two fingers to emphasize it.

"*Mei you*, M'Kenzie. Always one."

"*You*, lying-bloody-bastard Wang....*you!* Look!" I shoved the bills at him.

"Much *joss*, M'Kenzie," said Wang with an almost imperceptible shrug. He took the money and dropped two dark balls of resin in my palm.

You = "Have." Clever, eh? ☺

joss = luck, good fortune.

I was trembling with such excitement that I almost dropped one of the balls before I could fit it into the bowl of my pipe. Ah, to drink so deeply of the milk of Paradise...

*"When you're lovers in a dangerous time,
Sometimes you're made to feel as if your love's a crime,
Nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight,
Got to kick at the darkness 'til it bleeds daylight...."*

Something changed after I celebrated my great good fortune. Perhaps Wang Fu had greater respect for me, now that I was a man of greater affluence. Perhaps it had something to do with the girl having been with me (something I'm certain wasn't a secret for long in Chinatown) that made me more accepted. I never asked, frankly. The hypocrites back home would never have given a straight answer to that kind of question. In Chinatown, they would pretend you'd never asked it in the first place. I knew these people.

Anyway, the next time I went to visit my great good friend Wang Fu, he stopped me before I could pass through the burlap that covered the portal to Paradise.

"You no come, M'Kenzie."

"What's that, Wang?"

"You no come."

"Are we going to play the bloody *mei you* game again? I have money....see?" I waved some bills under his nose.

"No, M'Kenzie." He sighed with what seemed a dynasty's worth of regret in his voice. "No need come more. M'Kenzie good customer. Always pay."

"Much *joss*, yes," I agreed.

"Wang Fu send to M'Kenzie. No need you come Chinatown."

"Really?" I was more than a bit surprised. I knew Wang supplied opium to some who didn't visit his den of delight, but I'd always figured they were family. Which meant, I suppose, damn near anyone in Chinatown.

Wang nodded slowly.

"The girl? You'll send her."

"Depend. Sometime busy."

I grabbed his wizened old wrist, and I could see him wince.
"You send the girl, Wang. She knows me. She'll come. You'll see."

I'm stripped to the waist, a wide belt wrapped tightly around the top of my trousers. It's supposed to hold your guts in, should an enemy get past your guard, but I'm not going to think about that. The sword is heavy in my hand. It's not a burden, though, but a feeling of power. My arms begin to move in the slow, flowing motions of the ancient forms and I can feel the *chi* build within me. That the tiger will chose this path through the forest is something I know with the same surety that I know the *Yangtze-Kiang* will flood in the rainy season.

For a moment the thought of the girl intrudes, interrupting my focus: the gashes across her lovely face, the bruises marring her fragile body. Why the tiger didn't kill her outright....well, the monks spend lifetimes trying to understand those mysteries. My goal is revenge, pure and simple. The rogue tiger and I are two opposing forces upon this trail. After we meet, only one will remain.

I have no doubts as to which will remain. Victory permits no doubt.

The system works well, for a while. Days? Weeks? It's not really important. I don't really miss the walk through Chinatown, hundreds of intense black eyes always staring at me, but never looking me in the eye. Every few days, the girl brings me one or two balls from Wang Fu. I give her the money to bring to him, and pull her down beside me on the bed as I light the pipe.

Once I offered to share it with her, but she refused.

Whatever.

The nice thing is that she can be more open about expressing her love for me away from all the prying eyes. I draw her to me, kiss her....other things, as well. She is so unlike the girls back home, with all their pretense and hypocrisy. She never speaks the words of love to me, but perhaps she has never been taught them in the King's English. I try my best. Still, her screams and the way she moves beneath me are words in a language that all men and women understand.

When I discover her betrayal, it hits me like the worst pain I have ever felt.

All the money I had carefully hidden away under the mattress, enough to last for weeks....gone! The only explanation that makes sense is that she has been stealing my money. I'm careful to never give her more than what I owe Wang, so she must be taking it when I'm not watching her. Christ!! How could a woman steal from the man she loves? And to steal when he is at his most vulnerable: asleep, or lost in the dreams?

I wait for her, silent behind the door. This is something she is going to explain to me. Explain to me, then pay back every cent she has stolen from me.

I remember her coming in to my room. I remember grabbing her by the shoulders, and the look in her eyes when she realized I knew what she had done. Beyond that, my memory is.....confused. Her broken English, the damned Chinese babble, the shouts -- they all run together. I know I got the balls she brought from Wang, and told her that she would keep bringing them until she had paid back what she stole. Then someone was banging on the wall, telling me to keep it down, and when I hit back, she slipped away and was gone.

Whatever.

I knew she'd come back. It was just a matter of time. After a few days, though, she hadn't -- too overcome with shame, I'm sure -- and I was starting to get the sweats. I decided to go looking for her. Hell, I

knew my way around Chinatown.

Something had changed since my last visit, though I couldn't put my finger on exactly what it was. The people were staring at me like always, always out of the corner of those slanted eyes. I knew I was sweating. That was no doubt it. I've never understood, but none of the Chinese ever sweated. It was unnatural.

At some point, I found myself in the entrance to Wang Fu's. Was she stupid enough to hide there? I pushed past the diners in the outer portion of the shop, but there was no sign of either Wang or the girl.

"Wang! Wang, I want to talk to you about your thieving employees!" I kept shouting until the burlap curtain moved and the old man emerged.

"M'Kenzie. You not get message."

"What message? You sent me a message?"

Again, he made with the sigh. "I see you not get. You not have joss today."

"If I don't, it's because your girl stole it from me. Where is she?"

"She not here. You go now."

"I'll go when I'm damn well ready, you old thief! Why should I believe you? You're probably hiding her in the back, dividing up my money between you! Maybe I should just tell the cops what goes on in the back of your shop, eh?"

Wang's eyes narrowed. He paused a moment, then said very softly, "There so much injustice in world, M'Kenzie. So little justice. You seek justice, it hard to find."

"I want what's mine, Wang."

"So it is." The bowed his head. "I cannot give you this right in the moment. Go from here, and I will send what is yours."

"How can I trust you?"

"You are *wai guaren*. So are police. So are judges. Who will believe word of Chinese man against white man?"

Even though the faint scents from beyond the curtain were twisting my stomach, I managed a smile. "Very true, Wang," I said. "You'd do well to remember that. Send the girl. I'll be waiting."

He nodded, and I stepped back out onto the dark streets of Chinatown.

I do not hear the door open, but the small draft of air across my sweat-soaked body tells me she has returned. My gut cramps in anticipation of the bliss to come.

"Bring it to me. Bring it now, you thieving bitch."

Rolling to the side of the bed, I try to bring my eyes into focus. The shape there is dark, much darker than her usual radiant figure.

I can see the end of the pipe, though....the round, black void defined by a hard edge. As I lift my head towards it, the world turns white, then black, before I even have a chance to inhale.

Whatever.

Lyric inserts by Bruce Cockburn.



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Comments On Interregnum #10

Maranci: Thanks for the very detailed review of Arisia. I can't believe you pulled all that material together so quickly. It also sounds like you had a blast -- congratulations. The *IR* flyer looked great, and it seems that the Sampler was an inspired idea. I hope that by the time this sees print, you'll have some concrete reinforcement in the form of new subscribers and/or contributors. Ω Role playing as therapy? Ummm.....no, thanks. Not while I'm in the room.

Phillies: I bow and make obeisance before you, Oh Patron Saint of Obscure Aircraft. I'm not worthy...I'm not worthy.....

Taylor: I'm quite intrigued by your comment regarding more solo material being published in the past five years than in the early 80s. Do you mean commercial material? Or are you throwing in material available on the Net, too? If the former, what are some examples? I can't claim to be up to date on everything published for a lot of games, but it's hard for me to think of examples from the systems I'm familiar with.

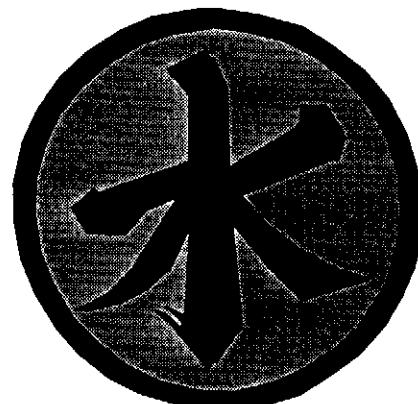
Aylott: Welcome to *IR!* I'm glad to hear there's someone out there doing a *Babylon 5* zine, as I think it's the most richly detailed, deeply plotted sf universe on TV. I just wish our bloody FOX affiliate wouldn't keep moving it around in their schedule! Missing an episode throws off the whole story arc.

I really enjoyed your thoughts about burnout and the Ultimate Plotting Campaign (although beware of Marancis bearing labels such as *The Insane Plotter* ☺). There have been times in the past where I started a campaign with lots of glittering plot threads just waiting to be woven into a fabulous tapestry of conspiracy, coincidence, and synchronicity.....only to have the campaign end after a few sessions. One thing I found that helped protect my mental health was to have significant subplots that the PCs could uncover within a few gaming sessions. That way you can have the satisfaction of seeing a few things come together, even if the campaign comes to a premature end. If it doesn't, then you get the added satisfaction of seeing the players knit previous subplots into the larger conspiracy. Fun stuff.

Glover & Glover: Thanks for the book reviews, although I must confess I recognized neither titles nor authors. Is it true we share a common language? ☺

Meier: Nice, atmospheric prologue. I liked it. Ω Thanks for the detailed critique of *Star Wars 2nd Ed.*, as well. You were quite gracious not to belabor the shortcomings, but what you did say was enough to convince me not to trouble with it. Actually, I've done so very little with the 1st Edition.....but when did that ever stop someone from buying a game, eh?

Sabalauskas: Great review of *Generations!* I'm afraid I cast my dollar votes with Chris Aylott, as I couldn't muster the enthusiasm to go see it (even for a US\$2.50 matinee). I only know one person who had positive things to say about it, and she is a diehard fan of William Shatner's overacting. The local cell of *Trek* fanatics I'm acquainted with (who would cheerfully watch *Star Trek: The Off-The-Air Static*) could only say that it was worthwhile insofar as it signalled a new series of *ST:TNG* feature films. Not high praise, in my book.



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The contents of this zine are fiction. I would include *Communications*, Letters to the Editor, in which I publish letters or comments from correspondents, if by some chance I ever received one from the readership.

Commentationes

The Log That Flies: I enjoyed your description of Arisia. My enthusiasm for the hotel, however, was tempered by my room's bathing facility, a tubless shower prominent for being about half the width of a normal human being. An underweighted floppy shower curtain insisted on showing its adherence to the Laws of Physics by obeying the Bernoulli principle and impinging on the already minuscule area.

For the Hall of Shame, you left out Mr. Two-Face, whose NPC's answers depend on the identity of the player asking the question, not the identity of the player character. A long string of people have described to me the peculiarity of one particular GM, who shall remain nameless, who has had the interesting behavior that his players were always of two classes: the elite, who got information and adventures, and the hoi polloi, who get ignored. Curiously, the supply of people interested in his campaigns has kept decreasing.

Session Notes: The owner of my local game store, who in my experience is often relatively perspicacious (after all, he has succeeded in opening a second branch, when people all around him have been closing up shop), is apparently firmly convinced that Money, The Gathering Thereof and its derivatives are the worst thing to happen to the game market in a long time. You get this long string of people who buy Money, and nothing else, so that Money is nationally 3/4 or 3/4 of the entire gaming etc. market. People play intensely to the exclusion of everything else. Then suddenly their interest in the game crashes to zero, and they sell or give away their cards, or, in one spectacular recent case, go to a Money convention held in a Hyatt, go to the top floor balcony of the atrium, begin screaming 'Free Cards of Gross Crockedness, Free Cards of Utter Gross Crockedness!' and the first the aforementioned cards and then the remainder of their collection

off the top deck. But they do not come back to the rest of the hobby. They are just gone, and the trend (which no one had intended) is destroying the whole gaming/comics/sf/rolegame market, or so the owner opined to me.

Who Is John Galt?: Saints preserve us! It's an AD&D player! Please do give us a report. I haven't seen anything on that title in a very long time.

The Parliament of Dreams: Such a clever title. wrto yr cts, with which I agree, to Maranci re arguing with a certain review zine, it is often considered unwise to begin an argument with an idiot, lest people become confused as to which of you is which. You may not be confused, but they may through up a cloud of obfuscation. Best of luck with your store. I believe the best available piece of advice is to have at least a year's income put away, in addition to what you have in inventory, so that you have a chance of getting the operation off the ground.

Softly, Softly: As I should have said, that's Tara and Jenny, not Jenny and Jenny or so I expect to be reading in this issue of IR. 100,000 unread Star Trek Messages? Well, perhaps if you logged on more than twice a day, you wouldn't get so far behind. (8-) Thank you for saving me the trouble of reading MagicNet (though I believe that an azure marigold would be worth a largish fortune). Magicnet sounds as dreadful as an SF Magazine novel I once perused, in which the Mafia was trying to conquer the world by pumping all the air into underground caverns so that people would asphyxiate, and no one could figure out why people were dying at lower and lower altitudes of altitude sickness. Apparently the author either had never heard of barometers, or did not understand what they did. Your disc is on the way. Note that sleeping with discs is less satisfactory than sleeping with books, since it tends to make the discs unreadable.

Tales from the Electric Underground: Are they still producing Star Trek products? Gee, I hadn't thought about them in long time. 'At that exact moment...' Coincidence is such a fine plot driver.

Fiction

* * * *

CHAPTER FIVE (Elaine, Men)

Elaine woke to find the morning sun well above the horizon. For a few minutes she listened to the birds in the distance. Even this late in the fall, she knew the hour from their calls. It was late. She had simply slept through the sunrise. Vaguely, she considered returning to her slumbers; instead she rolled onto her back and surveyed the clearing. Her joints were painfully stiff. Fighting Morgno, her cursed blade scrambling every swordthrust,

demanded much of her. If she had employed simple steel, he would have fallen in moments. Against the spells in her sword she fared less well.

A good night's sleep usually cured her aches and pains. Last night, though, her dreams had haunted her. She had been walking through sand dunes along the edge of a lake, searching for something she couldn't remember, even while she searched for it. Tiny waves rolled up to the shore. She looked down through them, seeing isolated water-weeds floating above the sandy bottom. The dunes and lake were real. She had been there once, when she was much younger. There had been a reason, now forgotten, for the visit.

A search of her pack uncovered traveller's biscuits and a canteen of cold tea. Last night had been terribly depressing, so that sleep was a welcome release from her cares. Now she just felt drained. She leaned back against a tree, and nibbled on a biscuit, trying to focus her thoughts.

She had not been terribly calculating, not for several weeks. She'd saved the Duke's city for him, frustrating the ambitions of Pyrrin Apostate. She'd stopped him before. Having completed her task, she should have claimed a reward and disappeared tracelessly. She had stayed, neither denying that she'd saved Arburg — mayhap averting the Duke's jealousy, though she doubted that — nor using her moment of glory to gain riches, weapons, or at least better trail food. Grandoon's library, one of the best-stocked collections on thaumaturgy she'd ever been allowed to use, held her enthralled. She remained in Arburg to read, careless of the problems which always arose when she lived too long in a single place.

Pyrrin's agents must have labored for years to put the elements into place. First, he'd brought the Guild Syndics to open revolt. Having taken control, his minions debased every custom, abused every privilege, and terrorized the people, performing every act of terror down to importing mercenaries to maintain public order. Pyrrin planned to wait until all hated the ways of their forefathers; then he would arrive to save the city from itself. Having destroyed its faith in its own customs, he would install new customs of his own, notably the democratic abominations he so loved. Pyrrin, protector of liberty, merely advised elected rulers as to the path of true wisdom.

Enemies of the people would have been subjected to moral rectification. Unreconstructed local nobility and clergy, Gowists especially, had appointments with the headsman. All after proper trials, naturally, in the course of which the doomed confessed to heinous misdeeds, some of which they had even committed. Centuries of established order would be replaced by Pyrrin's mobocracy. The populace had the illusion of power; Pyrrin sat behind the scenery pulling strings. The new democratic government would even be better than what it replaced. Pyrrin's first group

of flunkies, those he planned to overthrow, were always terrible rulers.

This time Pyrrin failed. The petty princelings and City Senates of the Tressin valley had foresight: if they did nothing together they'd eventually fight separately. For all that the Dorrance Academy affected neutrality to the affairs of this world, Grandoon had been more than slightly helpful. Not by casting spells; the fall of the tower was her deed, its protections ineffective against her. Once the Gate Tower fell, even mediocre wizards were enough to break the city's defenses. Just as well that people tended to forget her; if her limitations were well-known, there would be effective defenses against her.

Grandoon's political maneuverings were truly subtle. Who else would have prompted the Duke to check his nominal supporters within the city? Many were rewarded for their courage. Others were agents of Pyrrin, waiting to start the riots that would usher out Pyrrin's first set of flunkies, thereby bringing Pyrrin to the city's eternal rule.

Where did all this politicking leave her? Sitting under a pine tree on a late fall morning, nibbling at hardened waybread, was not the usual hero-tale, ending with hero ensconced in a palace. A palace really wasn't what she wanted. She had suffered through being thanked and praised for her deeds, always wishing that the thankers would keep their words short. She thought she'd kept those wishes carefully to herself. No matter how airily polite she was, though, people thanked her on one day and cheerily turned on her the next.

Last night Grandoon suggested why people disliked her. The events afterwards lay in her memory like a series of fevered dreams. Had she really spoken with magespeech, seen with magesight? It was unreal. She was not a mage!

It would be easy enough to find out if those things had really happened. They were obviously dreams, no matter that the memories seemed as solid as any others. Here, in a forest devoid of human habitation, she could safely lower her aura for a few moments. Assuming, that is, that she could lower her aura. She remembered doing it in a fit of anger, not even being careful about forming the Rune of Opening. Surely she could do it again, acting without haste or the pressure of time?

She leaned back against the tree, willing each of her muscles to relax. The sky was a luminous blue, filling her complete field of vision. No longer distracted by thoughts of the world, she tried calling the Rune of Opening, exactly as she had done last night.

The Rune was a soaring sheaf of outbound arrows, the creak of swinging hinges, the flare of light from shutters first flung open to the dawn. It formed as a lacework of interlocked ever-expanding circles, swimming into focus

before her. She concentrated on each detail of its pattern. It was correct; she knew it was correct.

Nothing happened. Nothing at all.

Elaine waited, gradually realizing that she had a deep headache. She released the rune, closed her eyes, and massaged her temples. What was different between now and then? The only possible differences were those which made her morning calling the more powerful. Runes summoned in haste and anger often misfired; those called calmly and clearly were always strongest. Perhaps sharing thoughts with Grandoon had been a dream. But why had she dreamed? Yes, it must have been a dream. The Rune of Opening had not parted the shadows around her, not this morning, no matter what she imagined last night. Assuming all was a dream made more sense than believing she had gained the power of mageborn, contrary to every other experience of all her life.

Now what should she do? She stood and slipped on her pack, its weight nearly matching her own. A knight might don full armor and clatter about on horseback. She couldn't even cast horsecalm; no beast would long bear her. For a long walk she preferred to keep chain mail and padding in her pack, its weight resting firmly on her hips and back. So long as she was careful with the fold of her cloak and the pitch of her voice, she could pass for a boy, run away with home with little beyond sword and bow. Even very desperate bandits seldom thought it worthwhile to try robbing her.

Grandoon was gone. His guest house had crushed the grass. Footsteps led to the guest house, but a careful search revealed no sign of his departure. Then she saw a line of crushed branches in the trees. "Gosh," she said to herself, "I never thought his house might fly."

* * * * *

In late afternoon there came the tap of hoofbeats behind her. This soon after a minor war, the highway was lightly travelled. Could it be the Baron, she wondered? Back with more bully-boys? She wouldn't have guessed the Baron had the nerve. He ought have scuttled back to town to create an alibi.

Whoever was behind her certainly did not travel very fast. She was not setting that stiff a pace, for her ribs continued to remind her of yestereve, but even a cautious wayfarer with mediocre mount ought soon have overtaken her. Someone trailing her would not, of course, pass her. Elaine's curiosity finally demanded an explanation. Picking a rise with thick woods to either side, she leaned back on a tree-stump to wait.

In a world of unique sights, the figure which finally came into view was astonishing, even to Elaine's jaded eyes. A knight in plate mail riding a barded warhorse, with second

mount in tow, was not that common. This far from town, most men spared their mount part of the weight. The horses, however, were not simply barded. From head to foot, from nose to tail, they were wrapped in their own carefully articulated armor plate. How could the horses stand the weight and heat, she wondered? The armor had to be enchanted in some unique way, marking its owner as one of fabulous wealth, or a collector of peculiar tastes.

Fifty paces down the road, the horses paused. There was a flicker of motion; Elaine found herself facing a man carrying a black wand and what was almost certainly a hand cannon. He must not have been chasing her; he seemed not to have noticed her until a moment before. Without apparent urging, the horses began pacing toward her.

"Good day!" she called out. "I'm not a bandit, that you need weapons against me." Her words would not be very convincing; her mind reposed behind its aura. Any conventional probe would report that she hid her mind, so her honesty could not be ascertained.

"Furthermore, young man," the rider responded, "You are entirely alone out here. I'm not afraid, merely taking a few elementary rational precautions."

"Simple?" she asked, trying to keep her voice pitched down. He thought she was a male; she had no reason to disillusion him. Whoever he was, he really did have a hand cannon pointed in her direction. Either he was an enormous fool, or his shields against spellcraft were remarkably thorough. At this distance, an unblocked tinderspark spell — which, of course, she had never cast in her life — would be enough to detonate all the gunpowder that he carried.

"A few little trinkets, a Harrek's death projector, a pistol, — after all, you might really be a dangerous brigand."

"Me? By myself?" She was ready to laugh. The Death Projector was powerful enough to slaughter a small army. "Don't you ever worry someone will use firespark on your gunpowder?" she asked.

"If you think it's so clever an idea, try it!"

"Not today, thanks. It'd be a bit rude. Look, I'm really not a robber."

"Doubtless a wise and courteous choice. Also, as you may have noticed, igniting the powder in my pistol will put a round in the general vicinity of your head."

"While the firepowder in your belt does what to you?"

"There isn't any. The pistol — my own devisement — uses an alchemical process to mix the firepowder at the instant the weapon is cocked. I carry on my person only firepowder's inert ingredients. Even now, you could only

fire the powder in the pistol's chamber. Again, I invite you to put my words to a test."

"Thanks. I'm still not a bandit. I'm not interested in proving I can duck and get off an arrow off before you can pull a trigger. Actually, I was more interested in your horses. They're incredible. How can they stand the armor?"

"My horses?" He showed mock-serious indignation. "Rollo, did you hear what he called you?" He looked back from the horse to Elaine. "Young man, as even a ploughboy should clearly be able to see, this" — he tapped the horse's head — "is no horse, it is a Largon's Sentient Automaton. Aren't I correct, Rollo?"

"In part." The horse's voice was touched with aggravated boredom. "Oh most great and puissant knight."

"In part?" asked the rider. Elaine watched bemusedly. The man seemed to have lost interest in her, as though his mount's opinions were of greater consequence than the world around him.

The horse's voice was a melodic alto. "First, in light of her sex, the person to whom you spoke ought properly to been addressed 'young lady', not 'young man'. Second, there are two of us, so we are properly 'Largon's Sentient Automata', the plural, though the appellation is a misnomer, automata being machines which are sentient or self-aware as a consequence of fundamentally mechanical processes, while of course we are reincarnates, living souls necromantically implanted in these devices for a given — albeit long — span of years."

"Yes, yes, I believe we've been over this before. Oh, pardon me." He looked back at Elaine as his mount's first correction sank in. "Young lady?" She nodded politely. There was no reason to deny the obvious. "I should introduce myself. I am Sean Bannerman, knight-paladin to his Wisdom, the Archpatriarch Gowophilus VII All-Seeing." A smile gleamed from behind his teeth.

"I, my name is Elaine." She smiled back. "And you are a Gowist — Paladin?"

"I suppose some people find my vocation surprising. But I have taken vows of humility, of love of knowledge, of faithful hoarding; my Patriarch promised me that by being a Paladin I can protect my collections more rigorously. Though to honor the faith, and not rout at the first hint of danger, is so frightfully hard. One's trying to do two contradictory things in the same moment. Indeed, without Rollo's advice..." he shrugged his shoulders.

"Without my advice, you would still be one of the Elect, and as virtuously unworldly as you are now," the horse interrupted. "Aren't you going to finish determining whether or not she is the dangerous band of brigands

lurking in this forest?"

"You mean you don't already know? Does she have a guilty mind?"

The horse's ears swivelled repeatedly through complete circles. "As I reported some time ago, she is opaque to spells of detection. A more direct approach is needed. However, her lack of collaborators suggests that she is not a band of brigands, while the Patriarch's word clearly spoke of more than one thief."

"Well, I asked her if she was a bandit, and she denied it, didn't she?" Knight-paladin Bannerman peered back at Elaine. "Isn't that enough? Besides, you're hardly a whole band of thieves, not all by yourself. In fact, you're rather lucky to have met me, because this road is too dangerous for a girl like you." Sean ostentatiously uncocked his pistol and returned it to his belt, giving no sign that he had initially assumed Elaine to be a boy. "Why, just last night, not three leagues from here, an Imperial Baron was set upon by three dozen cut-throats, and barely escaped alive after killing half of them, including their leader, a dastardly vixen with blond-brown hair, blue eyes, and the depraved habit of sneaking into groups of travellers by disguising herself as a ploughboy." Certain implications of his final words penetrated to Sean's mind. He paused in his discourse to stare carefully at Elaine.

"Do I look like a Baron's killed me recently?" she giggled.

"Well, I suppose not. But the bandits are dangerous. They captured two mail coaches last week, and have destroyed the taverns for several days' travel ahead."

And would view you as a choice target, considered Elaine, assuming they don't look too hard at the horses. She asked herself if she wanted to find a polite way to make him go away. Travelling in his company might not be the safest choice imaginable.

"If we're going the same way, I suppose I could offer you a ride on Orlo." He gestured at his putative packhorse. Elaine pondered. There was, alas, an excellent chance that her aura would work its way progressively into its mechanisms, with unfortunate consequences.

"Maybe, maybe I'd better not."

"Well, bandits are all terrible cowards who strike from behind. You're probably safer walking in front of me."

She tried to suppress a snicker at Gowist logic, as applied to protecting one's travelling companions. A religion which extolled cowardice as one of the prime virtues had no business inciting its believers to become knight-crusaders for the faith. "Are there likely to be bandits soon?"

"Likely within a league or less."

"Well, perhaps I'd best slip into my armor. If you'll excuse me?" She stepped backwards into the woods. If he went away while she was dressing, that would be fine with her. She didn't want him to think that she was changing her mind about the wisdom of wearing armor, or that she had been wrong in the first place, but the positive knowledge that there were bandits put a different light on things. Besides, if she didn't wear the armor she might start to get soft, perhaps even as soft as Grandoon.

"Would you prefer to use my tent?" he began. She took several more quick steps backwards, almost sprawling over a tree root. Did she want to walk with him or not? A group desperate enough to attack a mail coach — a fortress to which wheels had incidentally become attached — might be desperate enough to attack lonely, clearly penniless, travellers. Having him along wouldn't really hurt. Her chances of spotting the ambush would be as good as ever, if there were an ambush. He did seem to be heavily armed, too. On the other hand, he was absolutely sure to be attacked by any bandits he encountered. Skirting the road for a few leagues would not be easy; the woods were recent growth, still thickly undergrown with dense brush.

Was Sean a real Paladin of Gow? It was a strange vocation in that religion. On the other hand, the temple acolytes of Hrrdis, Minx Goddess of the Lepatoa, had a sub-cult within which virginity was a mandatory attribute. He might be a bandit, placed to lure her into a trap. His aside about protecting his collection rang true, though. And what sort of bandit would need to lure single people on foot?

She emerged from the woods. Sean and his steeds were deep in conversation. The two automata noted her well before he did. She decided she could be grateful that Largon had not made automata by the boatload. More than once, sneaking through a picket line had saved her skin; the beasts were obviously far more perceptive than human sentries.

Sean's glance took in her lightened pack, then searched for changes in her dress. Her cloak and cape flowed loosely enough that her armor was practically invisible, except for a gleam of steel near her throat. "We've been using one of my crystal balls on the road ahead," he announced. "About two miles further on a dozen or more men — from their body heat — lurk in the woods."

"It would," noted Rollo, "be a rational location for an ambush, at least against those with steeds which lack my, shall we say, fleetness of foot."

"He's good?" asked Elaine.

"Oh, yes, faster than any horse, even with four men on his back. Aren't you, Rollo?" The automaton ignored Sean. Elaine had no trouble getting ahead of them all to set the

pace. She tried to talk, discovering that Sean Bannerman, for all that he was a knight-paladin, was remarkably timid about maintaining a conversation. He didn't suspect that she might be a bandit, or worry that he should be circumspect in his words. He obviously thought that his magic weapons would protect him. He was, however, naturally shy.

"So, what do you collect?" Elaine relied on that question to start a Gowist talking.

"Largely, I amass books, though I also have some unusual weapons, a few of which I brought with me, like this repeating hand cannon."

"Repeating?"

"Yes, so long as I pull the trigger, it will fire three shots each second, until its supply of darts is exhausted. Mostly I collect books."

"Books?" Except for the hand cannon, which she had to respect, his weapons were all thaumaturgic gadgets which she could neither use nor fear. She still hoped that his unusual weapons stayed that way. The battlefield was already deadly enough, even for people like her who could shrug off battle magic.

"Yes, books. On astronomy, and the motions of the planets, and sky creatures."

"Sky creatures? Birds? Dragons?"

"Oh, no, I have an uncle who collects birds. He has, trapped on enchanted scrolls, the sound of the calls of every sort of bird that perished with lost Megrez, vanished under the waves these two thousand years. No, I limit myself to creatures from beyond the moon — beyond the crystal spheres of Tegel-la and Tegel-Sorin, if you believe Tegel-Sorin's sphere is still there."

"There are animals like that?"

"Not many. The best single book is still 'De Libris Celestovoris', though the 'Celestial Bestiary' of Omar is better known, even if it is a thousand years old. Omar treats both real animals and mythical ones, and tells them apart. For example, the Lyre-Spider — it weaves Lyran spider-silk, which cannot be cut save with diamond knives — came from the Evenstar, brought to Earth by a comet. Though the Chronicles of Ju'o make the comet sound more like a mechanical contrivance, a magical device, than a hairy star."

"An enchanted skyship? Made in Ju'o? During the Second cycle? They could hardly even enchant armor back then."

"The comet," intruded Rollo, "is explicitly described as coming from the Evenstar, using the particulate posses-

sive case, showing that the ship came from the Evenstar herself, as opposed to first appearing in the constellation in which she momentarily lay. The Chronicles of Ju'o further say that the Emperor of Ju'o himself received in his court a being from the comet. The declensions imply that the being was received as a mortal, not as some sort of demigod."

"There are other beings," continued Sean, "recent interest being on focussed on creatures alleged to have descended from the Nightstar — the yeti — and skyships of similar provenance, shattered by the dragons for invading their sky. Perhaps the strangest, and from Omar the most terrible, is the Vissorant, the living death, incarnate in a star. Omar's source viewed it as more dangerous than all else which lives, here or in the hereafter. Omar says that its ascendancy in the heavens is the doom of the world, since no man, no band of mages or dragons, can hope to stand against it. Fortunately, though he is a trifle obscure on this point, the creature's path 'circles ever through foreign skies, swims forever in foreign seas', so long 'the portal which is not a portal' remains closed."

"Just as well," answered Elaine. Were any of Sean's tales reliable? The Chronicles of Ju'o were usually reliable. Certainly the Lyrespider, for all that it ate only dews, sunbeams, and watermelons, was entirely poisonous to normal creatures, and quite resistant to spells of death-summoning, save those especially crafted against it.

"I find it sad," said Sean. "Here is this fabulous animal, the Vissorant, and there is no way that I can ever capture its true image for my collection. I also collect books about earthly animals, though I am not nearly so good at that. In fact, my books have scarcely filled a single room."

"Sean," remarked Rollo, "to impress the lady with your moral worth in accord with the tenets of our most noble faith, you might at least observe in passing that the room in question was previously used, by the Grand Duke of Pleven, as his chief public audience chamber."

"Details, details. Even being generous, I scarcely have more than ten or thirty thousand volumes."

Elaine nodded politely. Only a Gowist, and a fabulously wealthy one, would have a library like that. Grandoon's five hundred works on sorcery was by most standards a very large number of books.

"I see," she said. "That's really a lot. Have you read them all yet?"

"Me? Read them? Oh, no, I'm a collector. In fact, I have several friends, lay members of the faith, who I retain to read new acquisitions, looking for missing pages. Sometimes I can only get copies of those, which is really disappointing."

"I'm sure, I'm sure. Were you in the siege to collect books, too?"

"Well, no. Actually, the Patriarch sent me to the far north to protect the Faith's lands. I had half-expected that I would be involved in the siege, but I was lucky. It was over by the time I arrived. Wasn't it strange how the siege ended, though?"

"Strange?" The hairs on the nape of her neck rose. What was he about to say? She tried to tell herself she didn't already know, but her intuition gave her an outline before he spoke.

"They say the spell dampers failed at the North Gate. Not that I saw it myself, but I had a good friend in the attack, who saw what happened."

"What did happen? You hear stories, but your friend was closer than any of who I heard."

"Well, Vulf Vulfson was in the first party through the gates when they went down. He was supposed to fight his way through the tower to the spell dampers, to keep them from being fixed. Some of them had failed, enough so there was a gap at the gates, but the mages outside the tower thought it was only temporary, so anyone who went in would find themselves trapped when the dampers were restored. Vulf's party had a fine time of it, with flame walls all over the place inside the tower, but when they reached the dampers they had nothing to do."

"Why not?"

"The dampers had blown up — shattered under the strain. Vulf found a room full of dead men, bodies shredded by an explosion, the dampers in ruins."

"Why did they fail? That's how most cities protect themselves."

"No explanation. That mage from the Academy, Grandoon, was all over the place questioning people. Some say he wrecked the dampers himself with a secret cantrip from the Academy, to put down the revolt."

It always happens this way, she thought. As soon as she left a place, her name, her face, even the very idea of her existence began to change, finally to pass out of all recognition. Why did the whole world hate her so? Surely Grandoon's aura tales, if she'd not dreamed the telling, were too simple, too weak to explain the world's absolutely hatred of her presence, worse than that between Pyrrin and his sworn enemies.

"Is he still in town?" she asked.

"No, he finally flew away. Mages do, you know. Fly, that is. He was living by himself, north of the Tressin, and then he was gone."

"By himself? No bodyguard? No one at all?"

"Why, yes, alone. Earl Yoog himself told me. The Earl visited Grandoon, the day before the mage left, to give him a cursed sword the city had. He hoped, rightly, that Grandoon could take the sword without leaving the curse behind. No, the Earl said specifically that it was the only time he had ever been privileged to speak with a real Archmage all by himself, without a few retainers — let alone a whole mob — listening in." Sean hesitated. "Oh, I know what you meant. I forgot, women do tend to be more interested in that sort of gossip. That was the famous Grandoon, the world's greatest lover — or so's said — but all by himself. If you believe inn-minstrel's tales, he has as present lady friend another archmage, back at the Academy. So don't think of trying to steal him away, should you ever meet him, or you'll end up turned into a frog by his light o'love."

Elaine was quickly glad that Sean marched behind her. A slight turn of her head hid her face from Sean and his machines, as if she were thinking about something. Her rigid stare, writ on mage's face, was chill enough to freeze a cataract in its fall. She had been away from Arburg for no more than a few days, and already she had been faded from people's memories. That was the way people really were, except when they were talking about their own ancestors. They couldn't stand to have someone else help them, especially someone they hated. People had to believe that they had saved themselves. If need be, they'd protect their own self-importance by denying she even existed. It wasn't a new feeling; it had happened too many times before. The pain was as sharp as when she'd first experienced it, what seemed centuries ago. Silence came to her. She didn't want to say anything; Sean was too timid to push a conversation forward by himself.

"Of course," Sean finally began talking again, "Having missed one siege, I must go to another. The Patriarch bids me north, over the Ocean, to the Muabbin River. There, between the Taurine and Daurine Mountains, lies the city of Haigalras, besieged by Pyrrin's satraps. Its fate is uncertain. Who holds that city and its fleet controls all practical crossings of the Muabbin for a hundred miles. West of the city, Pyrrin's satraps face only petty earldoms and city states until they reach the Lyssan Empire, a hundred leagues beyond. Pyrrin sees the Muabbin Valley as a ripe fruit, waiting for the picking. Along the way, he will doubtless slay any Adherents, plunder their Collections, and desecrate the Temples of the Faith. So I ride for battle."

"Of course," said Elaine, "If they could cross the Daurine mountains, the princedoms of the valley would be delighted to treat Pyrrin's lands the same way. All those cities, just waiting to be looted, safe only because the Daurines are impassible. Oh, warriors and mages! Sometimes I'm sick of them! Why can't Pyrrin and his foes

leave the world to go around its business in peace?"

"For a sell-sword, that is certain a strange thought. Were there not perpetual war, you'd be out of work. Besides, there is a pass through the Daurines."

"A pass? No! There isn't even a smuggler's route. Even the Sky Pirates detour six hundred miles."

"Still, there is one pass, large enough for a great army, though blocked by a force 'seen not by mage's eye,' explained not by Gow's words, fearing not the Four Gods."

"Where's you hear that one?"

"Several places, all obscure, all recently come upon by me — and some in places even reliable. The chronicles," he paused self-importantly, "the Chronicles of Daifur note an Emperor who sent an army into that pass, on Gow's assurance that cold steel or sorcery's fire were enough for victory. The army vanished, archers, pikemen, elephants, and mages, in a single night. In Reven, the Grand Temple of the Four Gods keeps a cult map, showing the pass, labelled as a pass to which their God's power do not reach. In The Book of Heroic Deeds, the Mayevin Emperor Harrek is said to have gone there and bargained with its power — to what end was not recorded."

Elaine's skin crawled. Daifur had passed from the world a millenium ago, its histories now mixed with fable. A cult map, still held by its own priests, was hardly likely to mention weaknesses which did not exist. And Harrek? The Book of Heroic Deeds was so sodden with exaggeration of imperial virtue that she had never been able to wade through it; Sean's clue would still need to be tracked down. An army across the Daurines would be a stiletto thrust into the heart of Pyrrin's dominions. She hoped Sean hadn't noticed her response to Harrek's name. She didn't want anything strange to happen to him; so far he had actually been nice to her.

Rollo cleared his throat with the sound of a miniature wind-chime. "I believe," he said, "that we approaching the ambush. Perhaps it would now be advisable if my line of sight were cleared," his head swivelled slightly in Elaine's direction, "that I might project spells more rapidly."

"Don't worry about me," she answered. "Can you tell where they are?"

"Not at all. Indeed, they seem to have vanished. Perhaps they fled at our approach?" asked Rollo.

"Rollo," said Sean, "while running is indeed a devout act, it is unlikely for these bandits to be numbered among the Faithful. Nor would fleeing enhance their success as bandits, performing the Devotion of Collection — of gold and treasure. Wouldn't it be simpler to apply a blasting rod and level the woods to ashes?"

"Most great and noble knight," intoned Rollo, "recall that you are a Paladin, one who marches towards danger, rather than routing from war as is your natural thought — out of native piety, of course. Besides, if we burned down every woods within which bandits might lurk — well, just think of the expense. All that money might purchase books for your library."

"I know, I know, every little protection costs money."

"Which might, noble knight, otherwise be spent on your collections, may they multiply forever!"

"You always have an entirely logical argument."

Elaine smirked at Sean's final comment. While Gowists often came to reasonable conclusions, their rationales could be truly bizarre. How much enchanted weaponry was he carrying, anyway? A staff powerful enough to level a woods cost a small fortune, and last but a limited number of uses.

"Hush!" Elaine glared over her shoulder. Rollo and Sean were arguing like two old ladies in a fishmonger's. At least the other automaton was silent. If they were walking into a trap, they could at least search for it, not advertise their presence to everything with ears. Elaine put more faith in the wit of the horses than that of their master, but not by much.

The ambush announced itself with the crackle of branches, followed by a trio of figures swooping from the trees toward and past Elaine. She sprang aside, drawing her hand-and-a-half sword and discarding her pack in a single fluid motion. The dazzle of light behind must be Sean or the horses, entering combat arcane. She skipped across a fallen limb, to get her first clear look at her foes. She was more irritated than frightened by the sight of a bevy of sea trolls.

The trolls ignored her, making a line for Sean and the horses. In a sense, she knew, this was sound strategy. Sea trolls were almost immune to magic; Sean visibly had most of the enchantments in the party. She attacked the nearest troll. As it flew by she first clipped a wing, then put her sword solidly into its spine, leaving it twitching on the ground. Another pair of assailants, these human, were almost atop her. One she held off with her shield; a left to right swing of her sword floated through the other's guard and sliced into his skull. The survivor attacked her furiously. She barely had to think about adjusting her shield to deflect each of his strokes. Her backswing went under his shield into his chest. Behind him came a trio of dwarves with spears and throwing nets; they fared no better against her. She glanced back across a half-dozen bodies, finding Sean locked in magical combat with four sorcerers. Emerald light coruscated off his protective aura. His hand cannon had dispatched a pair of sea trolls; another troll was locked in combat with Orllo.

Elaine went after one of the sorcerers, cutting him down from behind. His amulets of protection from material attack shattered at her touch. The second mage saw her coming, and raised spell after spell against her. The woods behind her burst into flame. She was vaguely aware of lightning bolts discharging harmlessly in the air around her. Beams of colored light sprang out from various rings, staves, and — as she closed — his eyes. The rest of the world might fear such spellcraft; she had never been impressed.

She swung at him; he used his magician's stave as a common quarterstaff to deflect her blow. Her first attack was parried; his counter barely touched her helmet. They traded swings for a few instants. She made an overarm attack, concentrating on putting enough power behind it to shatter his weapon. He obliged by bringing his staff up to block, letting her strike the staff in the space between his hands. Afterwards, she wasn't sure whether her sword had hit him, or whether he had disappeared in the blaze of power she unleashed.

"Elaine, duck!" Sean's voice warned her of another opponent: a sea troll, trying to take her by surprise. The last troll still on its feet, it had seen her dispatch various warriors and mages without seeming effort. It fought her conservatively, not taking chances, assuming that while it killed her, its companions would use wizardry to eliminate her companions. It had greater height and weight; Elaine knew her advantages were speed and brute strength. In half-a-minute, she had acquired another dozen bruises, while it lay on its face, mortally injured.

Her eyes watered from the smoke. The woods were burning. Sean had dispatched the last of the bandits. She limped towards him, wondering how deep the wound in her ankle might be. Her final opponent hadn't been the scarecrow that its friends had been. Still, she could put her weight on the foot, so the damage couldn't be that bad. At worst, a good day's rest would take care of it. Sean pulled a wand from his saddlebags and gestured in the air. The flames disappeared; smoke fell from the air.

"Tisaphernes' Anti-Fire Ward," he said matter-of-factly. "The final solution to forest fires and other conflagrations — or would be if it weren't so expensive."

Elaine nodded. Her eyes still itched, but her nose reported the air was free of wood smoke.

"Why didn't you just run away?" asked Sean. "They were obviously after me."

"Running's a bad habit," she answered. Then, remembering his religion, she added lamely: "If you're not a Gowist, I mean. I suppose if I were, it would be different."

"But you're not." He stared, embarrassed that she had

come to his aid. For the first time he noticed the lines and curves of her face. Even under all the armour, he thought, she was rather pretty. Her skin was milk white, her cheeks rosy from exertion. And she had protected him, at risk of her own life.

"No," she answered. "Thanks for warning me about the troll."

"You weren't hurt when the staff shattered?"

"Me? Hurt by some magic toy? No, not at all. The only damage his staff did was when he tapped my head with it. That troll did the dirty work."

"You're bleeding." He fumbled and found another wand. "Lacertan Staff of Total Healing. This'll just take a moment."

"No, no." He paused when she spoke. "I appreciate the thought. But don't waste the charge. It won't do any good."

"Sure it will. It's made specifically to cure wounds of war — sword slashes, club crushes, arrow punctures..."

"That's not what I meant. It's the same as before. The magician's spells didn't touch me, and your spells won't either."

"Well, what if you took off your ring, or whatever it is. Just for a moment? You'd be safe. They've all run away, those that didn't die, and Rollo and Orollo would protect you. You can't want to walk on that leg, can you? Not the way it is now."

"What ring? It's not a ring. That's me, as much as my hair. This is the way I am. I can't do a thing about it." Not, she added to herself, that she would want to, if she could. Her final walk with Grandoon — or had it all been a dream? — haunted her thoughts.

"That's you? Not some trinket, some amulet or potion?" After the words were out of his mouth, he thought better of them. His question might have injured her feelings. It was too late to change his speech; he tried to change the topic. "I see. Could I do something else for you? Would you prefer to ride?" She was rather pretty, after all, and more of a paladin than he was. He really hoped that she would forgive him.

"I'll be all right. Don't think you have to keep my pace if you don't want to. I'll just be limping for the rest of the day."

"For the rest of the week, you mean, most gracious and knightly lady," said Rollo. "Or perhaps the next moon. Even from plain sight, those are more than slight cuts. However, the day is well advanced. Over the next rise, off the road and away from the smell of smoke, there is a

place where we might rest for the night. As I have previously noted, oh most-all-wise-and-all-forseeing-master, the thieves who we eliminated, in addition to destroying several mail coaches, also burned the taverns along this stretch of road, so that we must sleep like vagabonds under the trees."

"Better," answered Sean, "than fighting off bed-bugs."

The clearing held a small pond, far enough from the road to be seldom seen by travellers. As was her habit, Elaine went for a brief swim. At first she was dreadfully afraid that Sean would wait until she entered the water, then decamp with her pack and armor, leaving her with nought but the cloak she carried into the water. Instead, he stood guard over her, pointedly not looking in her direction while she dressed. He did win one argument. Trail biscuits, cheese, and fruit couldn't compete with the dinner he produced from his saddlebags.

They sat by his fire, talking of magic and history, each choosing not to ask the other of their past life. As the twilight faded, they played the naming game with the stars and constellations, neither finding a star the other didn't know.

Elaine worried about what sleeping arrangements Sean might have in mind, but said nothing to him. Sometimes men thought that a good dinner was sufficient justification for becoming physically aggressive. He had been too involved in their conversation to wonder where she might sleep. As the night deepened, a wave of his hand produced a pavilion from Orollo's back. Elaine smiled politely; Sean's trove of enchanted what-nots was awe-inspiring in range. When Elaine suggested that she preferred to sleep under the stars, he only smiled.

That question settled, she faced Sean again. Usually she preferred early sleep and an early rise, but this night was different. Having someone to talk to, as the evening grew deeper, was unusual. Besides, she told herself, three near-fatal melees in as many days had left her sore, with enough cuts that she was sure to wake more than once before dawn.

"Sean," she asked, "May I try a different question, not about the stars? How did you — why does a Gowist — become a paladin? If you'd rather not answer, don't think I'm insisting."

"Oh, no, nothing like that. It was a matter of simple logic. The Patriarch — Gowophilus, I mean, the Illuminated — he has a unique set of books on sky-creatures, and won't part with them; he said he would lose them only if a Paladin of Gow appeared and claimed them as reward for deeds of bravery. I guess he didn't think anyone would take him up on that, which seems odd, since he knows what I collect."

~to be continued~

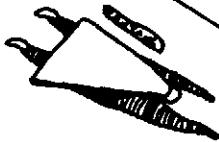
The Skeleton Key

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#13



STRANGE CURRENCIES

Personal relationships are a powerful motivator in any game, and over the years, I've found that for players with roleplaying bent, nothing gets them involved in a game faster than a personal stake. Who knows who, who is interested in who; enmities, friendships, intimacies. Love is the strongest of those bonds. Such intimacy, loaded as it can be with outside associations, can be very difficult to roleplay well, but if the player and GM are able to establish that level of trust, it can add an element of the unexpected to a campaign.

One example that comes to mind involves Kendra in my PBEM. Here is a woman who lost whoever she was before the mindwipe, and in the few flashes she's gotten, realized that she was probably very unhappy with her life. She was created to be the quintessential spy for the Hegemony government, travelling to an neighboring human power masquerading as a returning spy of their own with physical abilities enhanced by surgery and technology, with the personality overlay of the original spy. Except she broke the oath. Something went

wrong in the transformation process, and in gaining her psychic healing abilities, she became epileptic, unstable. Her emotional state at the beginning of the game was that of a broken but dangerous child, terrified at what the world had done to her, and what might still happen.

Now things have changed somewhat, and there is a new shipmate: Sigrid, warrior of a matriarchal culture, who was forced to leave her homeworld. Initially only a minor character, Sigrid ended up accompanying the group on its travels. Sigrid and Kendra started spending time together after a boisterous birthday party for the pilot, when Sigrid drew a bemused Kendra away from the rest of the party and seduced her. Kendra wonders if she and Sigrid are becoming more than simply friendly bed-partners, wonders if she herself is capable of real intimacy after what she has been through. Even if she is, there are still vast differences - their cultures are quite different, different mores, norms, even ways of expressing themselves. Is this more than a temporary association? Sigrid for her part is con-

cerned with "courting" Kendra. Her norms dictate finding just the right presents for the one she's interested in, yet she has little money. She's alone in an unfamiliar environment, where things don't get explained readily, and she seems to always be a few steps behind in understanding. Both of them have personal demons to deal with, and only time will tell whether they're able or willing to forge deeper ties.

Rather soap opera-ish on the face of it. But rather than simply being cheap theatrics or melodrama, I (and the players of mine inclined in that direction) have found that it lends interesting dimensions, both to the characters and the NPCs they interact with - and often ones we might not have thought of in the first place. In the end it's the exploration toward love that proves most interesting, all the fumbling, wondering, pondering, in some ways very much like real life.

BURNOUT: RUNNING OUT OF MATCHES

It's rare that I find myself losing enthusiasm for a game, but the signs are unmistakable. That missing high from a game well ran, the flat feeling when I realize that I don't really care what happens. Since I'm writing this during a Champions combat, where being stunned seems to be equivalent to a one way trip to player limbo, it occurred to me that I find that burnout occurs far more often as a player than as a GM. Perhaps that is because I'm picky, or have trouble finding just the right game, or never seem to be able to explore my character

concept as much as I'd like; often seemingly difficult when I'm looking for more than combat or linear pathways. I've found my NPCs generally more interesting, complex and fun than any character I've yet played as an actual character in someone else's game.

I find myself with lots of good ideas for PCs, but except for rollicking intervals such as the Avalon anthropomorphic animals game, it's never quite clicked.

The few times I've hit burnout as a GM, it's been as a long running campaign hit a lull,

or a seemingly impassable character-plot snag that I lost motivation to work my way out of. My current main game is my PBEM, which continues to chronicle (albeit somewhat slowly) the travels of a brilliant but grumpy engineer, a corporate-heiress pilot, a eccentric professor, and a mindwiped psionic healer-assassin (Kendra, mentioned in past Keys). Despite the tug of various strong personalities and style conflicts arising in the game, I'm hoping it will continue to be as enjoyable as ever. The thought that I'm (hopefully) graduating in a few months is little deterrent - they'll have to pry the keyboard from my cold dead fingers. So burnout? Only when lightning strikes, and I keep a surge protector handy.



DEATH AND THE AFTERMATH: A LATE REFLECTION ON RESURRECTION AND DEATH.

Resurrection never seemed to be much of an option in any of the games I ran. Most of that was because the games, whether fantasy, sci-fi, or somewhere in between, were relatively low powered, and it kept the players on their feet, knowing that there was no easy way back.

This is not to say that I wouldn't have considered some sort of quest for fantasy resurrection - as several people have mentioned, this can make for some fine roleplaying - and a careful examination of how much they are willing to go through to bring someone back from the dead. On the science fiction side, I've heard of characters who have brain-tapes of themselves, making death a minor inconvenience, which captures the main objection that many seem to have against the whole idea - it trivializes death and heroism. Why be afraid if you know you'll just be brought back/cloned/restored from taped backup?

Death in roleplaying has been examined before, ad nauseam. Some players are vehemently against it - others are strict enforcers of die-induced fatality, and most of the rest of us seem somewhere in-between. Without contributing further to this argument, I'd like to look at another aspect of death - the survivor's

reactions. It's understood that a PC death is a grave matter (no pun intended), but sometimes it seems like NPCs don't get quite the same respect. So they're dead. PCs shrug and move on, even if it was someone that their character might have had some sort of connection to.

I was trolling through my archived files from the PBEM, and found a conversation between two characters, the dilettante martial artiste Cassandra Ree, and the old space-miner Myers, that I thought was worth printing for consideration. This is from the first few months of the PBEM, at the time the Dauphin had been beset by stowaways, one of whom was Kendra (written up by Elizabeth McCoy in an earlier Skeleton Key) and the other who was an assassin that ambushed and almost killed Thora, the pilot. Thora managed to kill the assassin, saving the ship from being hijacked or worse. Most of the characters were relieved, shaken and angry, but steady. The player (actually one in my local gaming circle) portrayed Cassandra as a rather naive, immature girl getting a violent and gruesome introduction to the realities of life.

Cassandra is sitting outside of the restroom in a semi-fetal position with her chin resting on

her knees. she looks rather pale, and somewhat more disarrayed than at the start of the evening, but she looks more pensive than sick now.

She looks up as Myers approaches and, after a brief moment of paranoia, recognizes him from boarding procedures.

"Hey there, where have you been during all this? You missed the fun." she tries to smile for this brief bit of flippancy, but her face falls almost immediately.

"So have you heard all about... all about it, or have you not been to the common room yet?"

"I've been up to the common room. The others have more or less filled me in on what's been going on. Damned peculiar, two stowaways on one flight. Anyway, Random says that all O2 use is accounted for now, so we shouldn't be in for any more surprises. You don't look so good. Anything I can do?"

Cassandra looks down then gets up and starts walking back to the common room while talking.

"Not really... It's just that... Well, when this whole bit with the stowaway and the sabotage started, I thought 'Oh, cool! an adventure.' I thought of it as just a new way to use the fighting skills I have. I even thought it would be exciting, to get a chance

to fight someone for a reason - an actual fight instead of just a tournament bout. I've fought hundreds of people, but never because I needed to. And the idea of being faced with someone or something actually against us - a situation where I would *really* be fighting, not just playing a combat sport - I thought it was a dream and I'd have to wake up.

But that body... that person dying, and everyone acting so casual about it... Now I feel like it's a *nightmare* instead. More than anything, I think I'm ashamed of myself for being so *naive*."

She has been talking mostly to the floor, but stops and faces Myers

"Um, I'm sorry to go on like this... Please don't mention this to the captain or Nem, would you? They've probably lost enough respect for me already."

Myers will follow Cassandra to the bridge.

"After spending thirty waking years kicking around space and another thirty in cold storage, I've been on more than my share of sabotaged flights. You don't get used to it, the thought that somebody is trying to kill you, and that you don't know where he is, or what he'll do next. I'm a little surprised, too, that everyone is so cold about it. Death, even when necessary, isn't

trivial."

"I won't mention it to anyone, but I don't think you have to worry about anybody [except maybe Nem] losing respect for you because you're appalled by senseless killing. I think that's what we call morals."

"Maybe you should spar with someone a bit. It'll take your mind off things. I'm not much of a martial artist but maybe JP or Mara is."

The most interesting postscript to this came from Myer's player, who was not surprised at the reaction of the other characters. With few exceptions, people tend to play competents, and getting a bit unhinged by death, especially that of an enemy, isn't something that happens often. He was intrigued by Cassandra's reactions, and thought it a bit closer to how an average person might react to seeing a bloody corpse, even knowing that is all that remains of someone who would have done just the same to them.



COMMENTS ON INTERREGNUM #10

LOG #10: (AND PAST)

I enjoyed very much reading about Wonder, and am looking forward to seeing more on it. At last, amidst my hectic life, I chained myself down and wrote. Finally. My apologies for such an erratic submission.

SESSION NOTES #24:

I'll definitely have to pick up PacRim - and Mekton Zeta if it ever comes out. It appears our next campaign will be space-opera in the far future, ala Babylon 5. The internship is rolling along quite well, and I'm actually surprised to think that I may have some employment opportunities upon graduation. Only three months away and so much to do...

PARLIMENT #1:

Welcome! I think you're the closest physical member of IR to me (Tufts), though that may change in a few months. As far as burnout goes, I can certainly sympathize with the burnout - I find that three years or so seems to be the longest that a campaign runs for me before I'm wanting to move on to other things - there is so much to do, and so little time.

TALES #4:

The Avalon game is run, alas, using the Palladium Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. The GM, however, has done a good job in keeping the game from spilling into absurdity, while running it as a fast somewhat cinematic romp through a magical England populated by anthropomorphic animals.

SOFTLY SOFTLY #2:

A somewhat belated greeting, Jenny and Tara! I'm recently re-emerged from my attempt at graduation, and am somewhat bemused to find I am no longer IR's youngest contributor. :-) Appreciated the book reviews, and am determined to find that book of Rushdie's - once I actually have time to read books besides stuff for class and my thesis, which seem to be growing in monstrous piles all over my room.

BUTLER (IR#8):

I found your comments wrt NPCs quite interesting. "The NPC should only abandon old concepts and values after a major emotional crises shows the tried and true ways have crashed and burned." Can't NPC's learn and change slowly over time as well? Most value shifts may not be the result of major catastrophes in life but rather quiet realizations. I'm not sure I agree that NPCs should eschew reason and logic - rather reason and logic within the framework of their culture - which yes, may lead them to act in ways that are not immediately understandable or seen as logical.



ANOTHER SEMESTER ANOTHER CAMPAIGN

QUOTES FROM THE EDGE

"I always tell the truth, but I can't guarantee you'll be alive to repeat it."
PI ex-Stasi agent Rudolph Schneider, on his penchant for honesty.

"I'd really like to pull out my gun and show you what it can do, but that'd be messy - and this isn't my apartment."
Schneider

"I don't need to use my super powers - I'm cooler than they are."
Sargeant Wulfram, LAPD

"We're all heroes - even if we kill people."
Schneider, on heroism.

"Good thing we were here to protect you."
PI Schneider, after seeing his client telekinetically flatten a power-armored goon and 10 gun-toting henchmen.

"You know, my momma told me erotic was using a feather, kinky was using the whole damn chicken."
Kathleen, watching Wulfram transform himself into a giant chicken.

**"You see a six foot chicken walk by with a police uniform in its beak."
"I take a big drink."**
GM and PI Cassidy, describing Wulfram's transformed state.

"Do we have car? I remember before lunch we had a car."
PI Rick Cassidy, again having had a bit too much to drink.

**"What's golf?"
"It's a game involving balls and clubs but not in any way I'm interested in."**
Kathleen, trying to explain earth culture to Xerxes, canid from another dimension.

Softly, softly

from Jenny and Tara Glover, 16 Aviary Place, Leeds LS12 2NP, UK, for Interregnum

The scene is a large upstairs room with a leaking roof. There is a side light on the computer desk. Discs are neatly stacked in boxes beside and behind it. The door opens with a creak. A girl enters stealthily.

Tara: Aha! An unattended computer! [She boots up the computer and quickly presses "tara". On the screen in front of her (and her wolf slippers) appears a lot of garble followed by "restoring memory, restoring character"].

Tara: [nostalgically] Ah. So good to see my warrior still alive. Many's a fray we've been through together, with our mighty broadsword (2d5) (0+ 0+). [The screen shows the level the warrior is current on: town. The town is quite boring — a few blocks, well eight actually, with a coloured number that tells you what it is. For example, 1 is the general store, 2 is the armoury, 3 is the weapon smith, 4 is the temple, 5 is the alchemist, 6 is the mage store, you know, where you can get all spell books, 7 is the market and 8 is home, sweet home].

Tara: I'm getting out of this poxy town! [She moves the top cursor forward, reminding her confused mummy that basically the cursors are like compass points, and then finds a down staircase (little arrows on the screen). One is now on Level 1 and, by the way, the warrior is called Morgoth Bane and she is wearing chain mail, soft leather boots, gloves and cap. The pragmatic mummy asks what is beneath the chain mail armour. It never says, replies Tara, but she thinks that it is ordinary clothes. The mummy thinks to herself that someone round here has never worn chain armour].

Tara: Level 1, shwevel 1! [She advances her warrior to level 1 with 4 noughts after it. Morgoth Bane pants slightly with the effort of moving through this territory so quickly, but Tara has no mercy as she presses the cursor. It's almost a relief to the watching mummy — and certainly to the beleagured warrior — when the wand of wonder polymorphs him and, as Tara says, ... you're dead meat, Morgoth my lovely].

Tara then switches off the computer and goes downstairs to read Brian Jacques' *Mosswall*. Morgoth, trapped in the computer memory, hopes fervently that he won't be raised from the dead next time Tara switches her dad's computer on.

oo00oo

And that is the review Tara has been working on for the last week, playing Angband at every spare moment. Not that having a deadline is going to stop her playing it and I'm just grateful a) that she doesn't spend all her time watching tv and b) that I have a handle to persuade her to do something Mummy wants occasionally. She also has quite a hefty distraction, thanks to you, George: your novel.

There was no way that either of us were going to contribute to the discussion on burn-out, as we were both trying hard to avoid it. Getting involved with a Worldcon is not the way to burn in, but it is certainly the way to get a continual stream of email messages, plus we've been working on our fanzines. There is nothing guaranteed to turn a mother's hair white quicker than seeing two enthusiastic children formatting their fanzine on the computer which has the interior modem (= line to the outside world).

Seeing that the topic for this issue is ~~love~~, it might be possible to talk about "The Buccaneers", with particular reference (of course) to role playing. Based on Edith Wharton's novel, this new BBC tv costume serial follows the lives of four mostly rich American girls who go to England in search of romance and (if possible) aristocratic titles. By episode 3 (last night), they have discovered a certain cynicism. The first, an unconventional half-Brazilian beauty, has resorted to multiple lovers due to marital neglect (yet it is he who contracts syphilis). Three of the girls married for love: one found on her wedding night that her husband considered it a fair exchange that she should provide the money while he provided the title, one found that she was in love with love, not with her husband, the third found that her husband loved her and had money too. Then the rich American fathers gambled once too often on the stock market and the American women found themselves penniless, unwanted in a strange land, stranded by alien traditions. I would really have felt sorry for them, had I not been busy explaining sexually transmitted diseases and why they couldn't all get divorced to my son who should have been in bed long since.

In my opinion, this culture clash, so merrily exploited by Ivan Illich, is insufficiently considered in gaming situations. The party of adventurers set out to a strange land, their only guide a map or a stranger or a mysterious stone and no allowance is made whatsoever for the absolute foreignness of the situations they find themselves in. I particularly noticed this last summer, first in Iona, then Leeds with reference to *The Hobbit*. Iona is a small island, a mere 3 by 5 miles, so it is impossible to get lost. Errrr ... well, not quite, I've been lost temporarily several times. Of course, if you keep the sea constantly to one side, you will eventually find some known point, but it can be very scary tramping through bogs and jumping from one tuft of heather to another. I suddenly paused, one foot dry the other wet, and said to the kids *This must have been what it was like for the hobbits* (for then I was reading "The Animated Hobbit" to my son, unaware that he would then expect me to read the whole of *Lord of the Rings*). There was the occasional sheep track, but no roads, no tv, nothing but green, mud, water and the occasional bit of dried heather.

Later, in Leeds, we discovered a market under the railway station. There's a place where the river rushes into the canal under a vast arched underground bridge and you can just imagine the barrels of hobbits bumping and rolling down them. It added a whole new dimension to the book.

The point I'm trying to make, somewhat indirectly, is that it takes time to adapt to new situations. You don't (normally) just hack and slash at the first stranger you see (or if you did, the cities would become rather rapidly depopulated). I accept that, normally, you don't hack and slash at anything and that is part of the attraction of role playing, but while the fantastic element is desirable, I'd plead for the odd bit of reality here and there.

I was interested by what you wrote about the fanzine panel at Arisia, Pete. Here in the UK, fanzine panels tend to be very small anyway: very few people are interested. This doesn't stop conrunners organising such events, of course; in fact, it is quite usual for the same stereotyped programme item to be dragged up again and again, completely disregarding the fact that noone is the slightest bit interested in the subject. I should add here, that there are currently three fanzine items in the Intersection programme: one in the morning for absolute beginners, one in the evening on the grounds that "Do fanzines have to have an Attitude" (*Attitude* is the name of a new focal (?) fanzine edited by Pam Wells, John Dallman and Michael Abbott) and the one I'm arranging in the afternoon, which will be a workshop type. Tara furrowed her brow when asked if she could be in Malden for next Wednesday and then slowly asked: *Just where is Malden, Mummy?* I'd be interested in hearing about Pallas' Podium, just for general interest.

We missed *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, Douglas, since I incautiously asked Tara to plug in the answer phone. Since it was stiff, she did it, with her foot, thereby crashing the computer, temporarily breaking the computer and completely smashing the casing of the plug. It turned out that in my lunge to turn off the tv before anyone got electrocuted, I had pulled out the aerial, so once Rob (my son) and I had had a look round the tv innards, it at least started working again, and I had an extension lead for the computer. Intersection is being held in the SECC: a huge place. Obviously you didn't eat proper Scottish food or, as Dr Johnson put it, "the food of horses in England, and of men in Scotland" with the addendum by Boswell of "But what men!" or something similar. Oats. Whisky. Forget about those stodgy pies and mushy peas and eat proper food. Oatcakes (ie oats and water baked). Whisky served neat. You'll never want to see a cardiologist after that sort of diet ... you may wish to see someone else, however :-)
(By the way, health care in the UK is completely free, paid for by tax payers. So when I jumped over a wall, found nothing on the other side but 20ft of empty space, broke an arm on a protruding bit of wall and ended up in the River Leith, the last thing on my mind was whether my medical insurance was up to date. There's a lot of things wrong with the National Health Service, but they are superb with emergencies.)

George: Tara is having a bit of trouble reading on screen, but there is no way I'm going to print out your novel. Besides, I think she gets more out of it if she has to read slowly. Feedback to come real soon now.

Welcome, Chris, I hope you like it here. It's nice to see another fanzine fan, though I'm not so keen on *Babylon V* though watch it intermittently. I'd be interested to know how you feel Interregnum contrasts with your own apa. This, by the way, is one of the culture clash things I find which differs between UK and the US. There are apas in the UK, of course, but they tend to have been started by a group of people and people take turns to administer them, normally for a year at a time. Currently, for example, I'm looking after The Organisation, which started as an off-shoot to the Birmingham SF group, and still has a member or two from the Midlands. How did you start running your own apa? Did you wake up one morning and think that it could be the project of the day? Seriously, I am quite interested ... some US apas start when the people on waiting lists get a bit cheesed off and start their own group. Another interesting thing is that in the UK, apas are open to anyone, whereas US apas (in my experience) tend to be invitational only. I'm feeling a bit jittery here, as I can already think of several exceptions to this rather vague rule of thumb Now I've got to reformat again to get all this on one page. Bye for now from Jenny and /-ntara

Email : <jenny-glover@hicom.lut.ac.uk>

RuneQuest News

Who Is John Galt? #11

Curtis Taylor
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Alta Loma, CA 91737-6961
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Glorantha is the creation of Greg Stafford. *RuneQuest* is published by The Avalon Hill Game Company. *RuneQuest* © 1978, 1979, 1980, 1984 by Chaosium Inc. RQ Font © Oliver Jovanovic 1993. Who is John Galt? © Curtis Taylor 1995. The character John Galt is a creation of Ayn Rand. The use of the name of any product with or without mention of trademark status should not be construed as a challenge to such status.

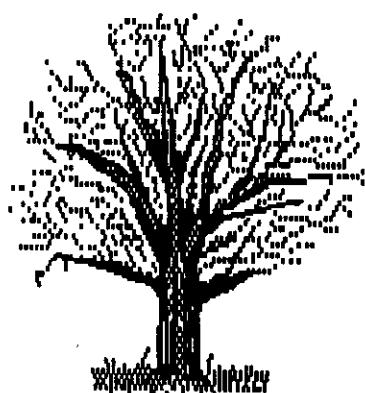
RuneQuest News

RuneQuest News

RuneQuest Con was a good time, a partial report is later in this zine.

New items released: *Lords of Terror* from Avalon Hill, *The Fortunate Succession* from Chaosium, *Codex #3* from Mike Dawson, a color map of the city of Galastar (about 11" X 17"), *Mad Prax - Beyond Sun Dome (The Unbearable Lightness of Yelm)* by Brian Hebert and Michael O'Brien, *RuneQuest Con 2* program book, *The Broken Council Guidebook* for the *Broken Council LARP*, *University of Sog City Conference Guide* for the *How the West was One LARP*, and the *RuneQuest Con 2* official t-shirt (Trickster's Night Out).

Also, announced at the convention is *RQ Down Under* in January of 1996, and possibly a *RuneQuest* convention near Chicago in 1996.



Reviews

Lords of Terror

Lords of Terror from Avalon Hill contains the following full cult write-ups for *RuneQuest 3: Primal Chaos*, Malia, Bagog, Thed, Krjalk, Pocharngo, and Krarsht. Following these seven cults are supplementary rules discussions, essays, and NPC descriptions.

Rules discussions and changes are provided for diseases, passion spirits, and chaotic features.

The Reminiscences of Paulis is reprinted in full from *Cults of Terror* for *RQ2*. This is the account of a young Lunar sent to the frontier for seasoning prior to obtaining a bureaucratic desk job in the Empires interior. Paulis encounters members of the various cults presented in the *Cults of Terror*. Since Krjalk and Pocharngo did not appear in this original supplement, there is no corresponding entry in the new *Lords of Terror* for The Reminiscences of Paulis.

A discussion concerning the Thanatar cult explains that the version of this cult presented in *Shadows on the Borderlands* is from Carmania, and the version of the cult followed in Dorastor is closer to the old *RQ 2* version. The changes in the cult for worship in Dorastor is provided in *Lords of Terror*.

A short essay on the nature of Vivamort (the Gloranthan vampire cult) is the source of one of the negative things that I can say about this book. Avalon Hill has been dancing around the nature of the Vivamort cult for some time. It is disclosed in this book that Vivamort is a sorcerous deity (similar to the Mostal cult). Vivamort's presence in this book makes the accompanying text of the Reminiscences of Paulis complete, but does not provide the complete write-up of the cult for game play without work by the GM.

Additional notes on the Path of Illumination are presented to clarify the information given in *Dorastor: Land of Doom*. I feel that a mistake was made in the presentation of this material in *Dorastor: Land of Doom*; the information was incomplete and left to many questions unanswered. This is corrected in *Lords of Terror*.

Even though much of this book is revised material originally presented in the RQ2 *Cults of Terror*, it contains enough new material to make it worth its \$15.95 cover price. This book is a definite 'must get' for the Gloranthan fan.

If you do purchase this product, please take the time to fill out and mail in the consumer questionnaire provided. It seems that Avalon Hill has the idea that they can use some of their limited *RuneQuest* resources to develop non-Gloranthan material, such as Victorian, Science Fiction, etc. Please make your vote is heard through this questionnaire. I have nothing against these other milieus, but do not feel that Glorantha should suffer to produce these.

The Fortunate Succession

The Fortunate Succession is a work in progress from Greg Stafford, similar to *The Glorious ReAscent of Yelm*. This work, along with, *The Glorious ReAscent of Yelm*, are leading to the eventual publication of the 'Lunar Book' which will be a Lunar counterpart, of sorts, to the *King of Sartar* published in December of 1992.

This work is the official list of the Dara Happan Emperors, which begins with Yelm and leads right up to Takenegi, AKA the Red Emperor. This is the 'proof' that the Red Emperor is the true and rightful ruler of the long lived Dara Happan Empire.

I would not recommend this item unless you are a Gloranthan completist. It does provide some of the history of Peloria, but can be done without unless you are working on a campaign in central Peloria and need some more history of the area.

The Fortunate Succession is available for \$25.00 plus shipping (plus tax for California residents) from:

Wizards' Attic
P. O. Box 718
Hayward, CA 94543-0718

phone: 1-800-213-1493

Codex #3

This issue of *Codex* contains the following articles: Imtherian Cheeses, The Edge of Empire (an introduction to Imther), The Election (fiction set in Imther), Guide to Factions of Imther, Jannisor's Face (Whose face do the Imtherians use on their artwork?), Lunar Policy Organs, Moon Boats, Urmalofotti (two versions of western Gloranthan Tricksters), Dragon Magic, Knighthood in Glorantha, Lies with Truth (nature of the sun god considering revelations from *The Glorious ReAscent of Yelm*), Blessed Swords of Rokar, GoonQuest 1 (a simplification of *RQ* stats for NPCs), Three Sisters (fiction concerning amazons), and the great Rat & Weasel (broo) wisdom.

A typical issue of *Codex*. This issue concentrates on the Lunar province of Imther (in case you did not notice from the above list).

This is recommended just so that you can see what can be done with an area of Glorantha that is not developed, yet. Harald Smith has put a lot of work into the Imther province.

Codex fanzine is available from Mike Dawson at the following address:

Michael Dawson/*Codex*
P. O. Box 9286
Richmond, VA 23227-0286

e-mail: codexzine@aol.com

See also the *New Lolon Gospel* review below.

Also available from Mike Dawson is a color map of the city of Galastar in 1618 (size is about 11" X 17"). I think that it cost \$5.00, but I am not sure.

Mad Prax - Beyond Sun Dome *(The Unbearable Lightness of Yelm)*

This adventure is written by Brian Hebert and Michael O'Brien. Thirty copies were sold at *RuneQuest Con 2*. This is a tournament scenario for 5 players in Sun County of Prax. It allows one of the players to play the role of the famous Melo Yelo, the baboon who wants to worship Yelmalio. Very enjoyable game. Recommended to all *RuneQuest* players.

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This tournament was originally played at Convulsion '94 in England. Michael O'Brien ran this adventure at *RuneQuest Con 2*.

I do not know if this adventure is available for purchase outside of the convention.

RuneQuest Con 2 program book

This convention booklet contains the normal stuff you would expect to find in a convention booklet plus two pieces of art by Dan Barker, and the following articles: Origins of Glorantha by Greg Stafford (which discusses his life when he first recorded the adventures of Prince Snodal), A Letter about an Egg by Jeff Okamoto (which gives a Kralorean view of the Pseudocosmic Egg found in Dorastor), The Tale of Segn Melanoro, Yelm Warrior by Sandy Petersen (the fictional tale of a Dawn Age Dara Hapan cavalry officer), an *Ars Magica* article by Jonathan Tweet, and a *Jorune* article by Joe Coleman.

This is available from Eric Rowe/Shannon Appel if you purchase both of the LARP books described below. See address below

The Broken Council Guidebook

This contains the background material for *The Broken Council* LARP. It's pretty much a whirlwind tour of First Age Glorantha, including the History of the Council, an examination of all the First Age lands of Central Genertela and biographies of all the attendees of the God Project. 36 pages, \$10.00. Contact Eric Rowe at:

RQCon
2520 Hillegass Ave, #101
Berkeley, CA 94704

e-mail: appel@erzo.berkeley.edu

The University of Sog City Conference Guide

This booklet contains the background material for the *How the West Was One* LARP. It contains lots of useful history on Malkionism and the West, as well a guide to

Sog City itself, and some notes on the Conference and prominent personalities. 36 pages, \$10.00. Contact Eric Rowe at the address above.

New Lolon Gospel

An amateur magazine spotlighting the Lunar Kingdom of Imther. This item is produced by Harald Smith. The myths and religions of Glorantha that we are familiar with are given an alternate twist by the residents of this kingdom. Orlanth, for example, is a Trickster type deity in this area. Orlanth did not actually kill Yelm in the myths of this region, but only tricked him into Hell, and locked the gate behind him. Nor did Orlanth lead the Lightbringer's Quest, but only went along as the Trickster persona and caused its near failure.

There is more to offer in this product than the alternate myths of the Orlanth cycle, such as the compendium of the regions mythically important personas (similar to the prospodia in *Gods of Glorantha*). There are many myths of the new and altered deities of the area.

I actually recommend this item over the *The Fortunate Succession* due to the more use available with this product and the price. See also *Codex #3* review above.

New Lolon Gospel (40 pages) is available for \$4.00 plus shipping (plus tax for California residents) from Wizards' Attic, whose address is printed somewhere above.



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Who is John Galt? #11

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Rumors from RQ Con 2

MOB and Nick Brooke are working on a new *RuneQuest* combat resolution system based on the Prince Valiant combat resolution system. They have incorporated one significant change, though. You do not use a coin, but a bottle cap from a beer that you have consumed during the game session in progress.

Sandy Petersen provides the newest endorsement of Rogaine since his recent Trollish induced complete baldness.

The Canadian contingent to *RQ Con 2* have incorporated a rule change concerning the craft category of skills for *RuneQuest 3*. The player must demonstrate the craft skill of their characters in order for the character to play in the game. Apparently due to this requirement, all of the Canadian players had a huge quantity of beer at hand.



Comments On *Interregnum* #10

Peter Maranci

Re The IR Sampler: I could have easily distributed twice the number of samplers you sent me, also. All the people waiting in line to register at convention on the first night were voraciously devouring the IR samples.

Re comment Scott Ferrier: Scott,
don't listen to them about the laser printer. You
can resist. Spend the money on something else.
Send the money to me.

Re comment Gil Pili: I believe that the book is actually called *Interview with the Vampire*. I don't recall whether the movie was titled differently, though.

• re The Gamemaster's Hall of Shame:
Good stuff! Is this the text version of
the video you showed at Arisia '94 and '95?

Dale Meier

re #@&% Marvel: I agree.

& re SoloQuest: Thanks.



RuneQuest and Glorantha on the Net

There are sources of *RuneQuest* and Glorantha available on the Internet. Most of the item below are available to those with full internet access.

Newgroups: There are two newsgroups that occasionally have *RuneQuest* material on them: <rec.games.frp.misc> for discussion and <rec.games.frp.marketplace> for purchasing those mythical *RQ 2* publications.

Wide World Web (WWW): Two come immediately to mind, the *RQ Adventures* fanzine homepage <<http://www.best.com/~savage/rqa.html>> and

the Gloranthan Digest archives
<<http://hops.wharton.upenn.edu/~major>>. You also might want to check out both of Tom Zunder's home pages at
<http://www-bprc.mps.ohio-state.edu/cgi-bin/hop/Tom_Zunder.html>.

The WWW is now available through Prodigy and will soon be available through America Online.

ftp: The only ftp site I know of at this time is the site maintained by Shannon Appel at Berkeley <ftp.csua.berkeley.edu/pub/runequest>, which contains quite a bit of information. Definitely worth the visit.

Digests: There are two digest that I know of. The Gloranthan Digest and the *RuneQuest* Rules Digest. To get information on either of them, I recommend that you send two separate e-mail messages. Both of them addressed to <Majordomo@hops.wharton.upenn.edu>. In the main body of the first message, send the message <help>. In the main body of the second message, send the message <lists>. These two commands will get you all of the information that you will need to be included on the mailing list of the digest(s) you wish to join. Please note, commands in the "Subject:" line are not processed.

America Online: This commercial service contains some items and boards pertaining to *RuneQuest*, including an Avalon Hill area and a Codex fanzine area. I do not think that access to the material contained on AOL is reason alone to purchase their service, but if you are already a member, drop me a line and I will review the location of the areas that may be of interest to you.



Revised by Prof. Dr. S. N. Bhattacharya and Prof. Dr. S. K. Ghosh

RuneQuest Con 2

I decided on the day that I arrived for the convention that I did not want to concentrate on note taking like I had during RQ Con 1 in Maryland, but that I would concentrate on having a good time. As a result of this policy, I do not have any pictures of the convention, nor do I have many notes. I will present some of the notes below, and the rest in later issues of this zine.

As he has done at the previous conventions that feature *RuneQuest*, David Cheng hosted the Glorantha Lore Auction, wherein for \$1.00 a member of the audience gets to ask Greg Stafford, Sandy Petersen, or other knowledgeable Gloranthan sources one question that has a short answer. There are some questions that will not be answered, according to Greg Stafford, and one of those is 'what are the questions that won't be answered?'

Here are the questions and answers that I was able to record. (I am writing this from notes, so I may not be giving exact quotes.)

Q: Who are Vinga's parents?

A: Orlanth and Ernalda or the tribal chiefs.

Q: What was Vinga's role prior to becoming a goddess?

A: None.

Q: Are God Learners inhabiting the God Forgot region?

A: No.

Q: Are Malia and Chalana Arroy two sides of the same coin?

A: No.

Q: I have noticed that the Kralorean emperors names are based on Asian Indian names, and their subjects are based on Chinese names. Does this indicate that the emperors are from a different culture than their subjects?

in a different

Q: Who raped Thea?

A: That depends on the story that you are listening to.

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Who is John Galt? #11

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Q: What is the Wild Healer of the Rockwoods?

A: A broo that has not had its chaos healed. It maybe illuminated, who can tell?

Q: The published myths give us a blue moon and a red moon. Are there any more?

A: Predictions of a white moon in the future to bring peace and prosperity. In the Godtime there was a green moon in the green age, more than one blue moon, and a story of a black moon.

Q: Do the Dara Happans look like other Pelorians?

A: They are more brown than the Pelorians. The true Yelmites have blonde hair.

Q: Did the Only Old One recognize the Pharaoh?

A: The Only Old One could not discover the identity of the Pharaoh; he lacked the means to do so.

Q: Did Ikadz the Torturer provide anything to the Lightbringers Quest? He is not part of the original Orlanth religion; what good has he done?

A: He is the surgeon of the gods; he cuts away parts that are bad.

Q: Each Lightbringer fails in their strength. What did Ginna Jar fail in?

A: Ginna Jar is a blank spot or the collective spirit of the group. Whatever individual is filling that spot will fail.

Q: Time is different after the Sunstop. Why?

A: After the Sunstop, time was different, and Gbjaji is at fault.

Q: Does the Trickster have a chaotic aspect?

A: No.

Q: Are there Eurmali worshippers in the West?

A: Only if they are well hidden; a madman might serve that function, but will not have a temple.

Q: Is Hell Roar (Zorak Zoran spirit of retribution) the Lower Wind - the sixth son of Kolat?

A: No.

Q: What are the EWF waltzing and hunting bands?

A: Missionaries.

Q: Who were the Outer Atomic Explorers?

A: HeroQuesters who wanted to make it through the boundary of Glorantha and into the Void. Most made it but did not come back. They made themselves into the simplest form possible to help prevent their destruction by chaos; the more complex you are, the easier it is to be destroyed by chaos. Among their other goals, they wanted to see Glorantha from the outside.

Q: Is Zorak Zoran the troll sun god?

A: No.

Q: Since you have stated previously that there cannot be any change without the Trickster, is he not bound by the Compromise?

A: His part of the Compromise is to break rules, but to break the Compromise, he must act against his nature.

Q: Who killed Basmol?

A: Everyone who is in the legends, but it is not different versions of the same story; he was killed multiple times.

Q: It is known that Orlanthi find belching to be a show of strength; is farting the same?

A: They might have contests in this area, but maybe not in mixed company.

Q: Were there any groups of trolls not involved in the Trollkin Curse?

A: No, but only Uzko got cursed, the Jungle Trolls were not affected since they are a different species.

Q: Did Orlanth hide the secret inner wind in the humble bean?

A: No.

No colophon this time!

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SoloQuest

The Myths of Orlanth

The Introduction

You are an Initiate of the Air god Orlanth and of Eralda the Earth Mother. You and your wife, Myella, have lived in the Zola Fel River Valley for four years, now. You both came seeking a new beginning by farming the river valley in the ways of Orlanth and Eralda and now live in your own stead. The Duke (the local lord put into place by the Imperial Lunar Government) and his mercenaries have provided protection and stability to the area; you and the other farmers have provided food and income to the area. Occasionally, you and the other farmers are called to do a minor service for the Duke.

Myella is twelve weeks pregnant with your child...you both have tried before to conceive a child, but it was not in Eralda's scheme of things to be until now. A Divination performed last season confirmed that she is pregnant with a healthy child. This is good, for this will finally allow Myella to become a Priestess of Eralda, something that this area can put to good use.

You are on your way home from the shores of the Zola Fel River. A newtling reed boat from up river was damaged, and the newtlings wanted a guard while the repairs were performed. You were dispatched to aid them. Their fears were put to rest when you defeated a giant chaotic dragon snail that wanted to eat them and their cargo. The newtlings rewarded your bravery with gifts of the river...a shell necklace, a sack of tasty dried fish, fresh snails, and the blessings of their god...Frog Woman.

When you are ready to begin, go to entry number 34.

The Player Character

This adventure is designed to be used with an Orlanth initiate due to mythic encounters. In a pinch, any air cultist would work, though.

You have three options to choose from in deciding which character to use: 1) Generate your own using RQ 3 rules; 2) Use a PC of your own; or 3) use the character provided.

6 亂 亂		Nodar Tanskin		□ X		
Initiate of Orlanth and Eralda						
Farmer/Ex-Adventurer						
STR	16	Move	3			
CON	18	HP	17			
SIZ	15	FP	34-17 = 17			
INT	12	MP	16+7 crystal = 23			
POW	16					
DEX	12	Ringmail armor:				
APP	13	01-04	r. leg	5/6		
		05-08	l. leg	5/6		
		09-11	abdom	5/6		
		12	chest	5/7		
		13-15	r. arm	5/5		
		16-18	l. arm	5/5		
		19-20	head	5/6		
Weapons	SR	AT	Damage	Pts		
1H Steel Sword	7	70/49	1d10+1+d4	12		
1H Spear	7	61/32	1d6+1+d4	8		
Javelin	3	76/-	1d10+d2	8		
Target Shield	8	74/30	1d6+d4	12		
Spirit Magic(72%): Bladesharp 4, Heal 4, Disrupt, Strength 1, Shimmer 2.						
Divine Magic(92%)(one use only): Worship Orlanth, Wind Words, Shield 2, Enchant Iron.						
Skills: Climb 62, Dodge 43, Jump 76, Throw 45, Bargaining 45, Fast Talk 35, Oratory 67, Speak Praxian 35, Speak Sartarite 60, Speak Stormspeech 54, Speak Tradetalk 30, Animal Lore 49, First Aid 30, Mineral Lore 53, Plant Lore 45, World Lore 15, Play Flute 39, Listen 67, Scan 82, Search 52, Track 45, Hide 75, Sneak 30.						
Magic Items: 7-pt MP stoning crystal in ring on left hand.						
Treasure: Silver bracelet worth 200 Lunars, 15 Lunars and 4 clacks in coin, Shell necklace.						

34 As you make your way back to your stead, you notice several plumes of smoke rising from behind the hill where your stead and the steeds of your neighbors are located. The plumes are to large to be smoke from hearth fires.

You redouble your efforts to reach your home and your loving wife. As you crest the small ridge that has kept your home hidden from view, you finally see that your crops and the crops of your neighbors are burning! This bodes ill! Your stead is at the edge of a group of steeds. The stead of Ganderman, an older farmer, was chosen by you and your neighbors as the location to defend if a large raiding party attacked. From your vantage point, you see two groups of people; one group of eight mounted alticamelus (AKA high llama) riders at the Ganderman stead harassing the occupants. Another group of eight mounted alticamelus riders is at the stead next to yours. This appears to be a raiding party of the animal riding nomads of Prax. They are the local scum.

When you went out earlier today, you left your wife, Myella, tending her vegetable garden next to your stead. Where could she be now?

Go to 38 if you wish to stay on this ridge and scan the area for signs of your wife.

Go to 52 if you wish to rush to the Ganderman stead as fast as possible.

Go to 41 if you wish to rush to your own stead as fast as possible.

35 You notice nothing else.

Go to 52 if you wish to rush to the besieged Ganderman stead as fast as possible.

Go to 41 if you wish to rush to your own stead as fast as possible to search for signs of your wife.

36 When you reach your stead, the unmounted nomad warrior comes out with a bag of loot over his shoulder and Myella's copper stew pot in his hand. He seems to be surprised. His only means of escape is through you. You have one round to act (you may attack him if you like) before he begins to drop his loot and readies himself for combat. (Subtract one point from his armor in every location...he has not had time to cast Protection 1 since you surprised him.)

Go to 49.

37 Due to the drifting smoke and an unused irrigation ditch you may use your full Hide skill percentage as you attempt your escape.

If you fail your Hide skill, go to 61.

If you succeed, go to 45.

38 You can easily see all of the local steeds from this vantage point.

Try your scan skill.

If you succeed, go to 46.

If you fail, go to 35.

39 The nomad will press his attack. Go back to 49 and finish the combat.

40 You reach the protection of the small trees and brush at the rivers edge and have a brief respite from the nomads. You see that you are being chased by six alticamelus riders. The other two are handling your captured neighbors. You see Myella among them! You cannot reach your wife and friends with these six nomads closing in on you.

Go to 47.

41 As you reach your stead, you discover an unmounted nomad warrior coming out of your stead with a bag of loot over his shoulder and Myella's copper stew pot in his hand. He seems to be surprised. You have one round to cast any spells or prepare any weapons you wish. The nomad drops all of his loot, draws his broadsword and readies his shield while you do this. (Subtract one point from his armor in every location...he has not had time to cast Protection 1 since you surprised him.)

Go to 49.

42 As you reach for the safety of the Amphibian Princess you see that her legs are that of a frog. When you are in her grasp, she leaps mightily into the air with you in tow. Suddenly, the air is whistling past your ears and the earth looms far below you. Ahead of you, growing visibly larger as you approach, is the imposing Block...the solid piece of Law that is pinning the Devil. Can this be your destination? Until April, the end.

43 Go to 41.

44 You hear a group of mounted nomads moving towards your stead. You may attempt to escape towards the river, or you may stay in combat with the single nomad as his clansmen move in on you.

Go to 58 to escape.

Go to 56 to stay in combat as the other nomads arrive.

45 The nomads are soon roving around the area, looking for the attacker of their brother. They seem upset. You have reached the closest point closest to the river under cover, and must make a dash for the foliage now; the nomads are moving in your direction. As you rush towards the cover, you are the target of a single disruption spell cast by a nomad with 15 magic points. Roll to determine the effects.

If you become disabled, go to 56.

If you are not disabled, go to the protection of the foliage at 40.

46 You do not see any sign of your wife. However, you do see a lone, unmounted, nomad warrior at your stead, going in and out of the place like he owned it! The bastard!

Go to 59 if you wish to rush to your own stead as fast as possible to attack the nomad there.

Go to 52 if you wish to rush to the Ganderman stead as fast as possible.

47 The nomads are riding their alticameli into the foliage. You may flee to the river at 57 or fight the nomads at 56.

48 You are able to put some distance between the nomads and yourself. As you near the foliage at the river bank, the nomads spot you and give chase. Suddenly, your mule slows to a ponderously slow gallop. Must be magic! You dismount the stricken creature to continue on foot. The foliage is very close, now.

Go to 55.

49 The only way that this nomad can get to freedom is through you. He begins to scream and shout in Praxian.

If you both are still fighting after seven melee rounds, go to 44.

If you disable any location on the nomad, go to 54.

If the nomad disables any location of yours, go to 39.

If the nomad kills you, go to 64.

If you kill the nomad, go to 60.

† □ **Praxian Nomad** **† □**

un-mounted alticamelus rider

STR	11	Move	3
CON	12	HP	13
SIZ	13	FP	23-9= 14
INT	12	MP	13
POW	13		
DEX	12		
APP	10		

Cuirbouilli armor and Protection 1:

melee	location	missile	ap/hp
01-04	r leg	01-03	4/5
05-08	l leg	04-06	4/5
09-11	abdom	07-10	4/5
12	chest	11-15	4/6
13-15	r arm	16-17	4/4
16-18	l arm	18-19	4/4
19-20	head	19-20	4/5

Weapons	SR	A/P	Dam.	Armor
broad sword	7	50/35	1d8+1	12
javelin	3	60/-	1d10	8
buckler shield	8	74/30	1d6	12

Spirit Magic(56%): Heal 2, Bladesharpen 1, Protection 1, Peaceful Cut.

Skills: Dodge 20, Jump 30, Bargaining 10, Oratory 20, Speak Praxian 60, Speak Sartarite 10, Speak Tradetalk 10, Animal Lore 55, Craft (Butcher) 40, First Aid 25, World Lore 10, Listen 65, Scan 50, Search, 25, Track 45, Hide 30, Sneak 29.

50 Go to 62.

51 You are now the target of a single javelin thrown at 32% effective skill. Roll to determine effects; it will do 1d10+1d2 points of damage if it strikes.

If you become disabled, go to 56.

If you are not disabled, go to the protection of the foliage at 40.

52 As you hurry towards the Ganderman stead, the group of eight nomads near your stead start towards the Ganderman stead also. If you move back towards your own stead, you should be able to stay out of the line of site of all the nomads involved, and be able to reach your own stead.

If you wish to attack either group of nomads instead, go to 56.

Go to 43 to reach your stead safely.

53 As you move around the corner of your stead to make good your escape to the river, you notice a mule tethered next to an alticamelus at the back of your stead. Myella must have borrowed the Ganderman mule this morning to move some of her vegetables to market.

The alticamelus looks exotic and dangerous.

The nomads are near, but with luck you should be able to make it to the river and the dense foliage at its banks.

Go to 37 to escape on foot.

Go to 48 to escape on the mule.

54 The nomad surrenders. He allows you to disarm him and tie him up. After making sure that he is secure, you notice your stead has been looted and some blood is inside your stead that did not come from your recent combat...is Myella safe?!!?

Go to 63.

55 As you rush towards the cover, you are the target of a single disruption spell cast by a nomad with 15 magic points. Roll to determine the effects.

If you become disabled, go to 56.

If you are not disabled, go to the protection of the foliage at 51.

56 Your combat with the group of mounted alticamelus riders is short as you are destroyed by their swords and javelins. Songs will be sung and tales told of your death by this clan of nomads. The end. †

57 You reach the rivers edge and slip into the water due to some mud. The nomads are flinging javelins at you when suddenly a figure forms from the water. Time seems to stand still as a woman with an amphibian head takes shape before you. She speaks with a beautiful croaking voice, "It appears that we have the same enemies - chaos and the unkempt nomad. I believe we can help each other. It is not unheard of for the storm and waters to help one another. Aid me and you will be helping yourself. Come with me, man of the storms."

You may accompany Frog Woman to 42 or you may watch her leave as you face the nomads at 56.

58 The nomad will get one final strike at you at plus 10% to hit.

If the nomad kills you, go to 64.

If the nomad disables one of your legs his clansmen will arrive before you can make good your escape. Go to 56.

Otherwise, go to 53.

59 As you move towards your stead, the nomad seems to be occupied with collecting your belongings for himself as he moves in and out of your stead. He is not looking for you.

You may attempt a Sneak roll in order to surprise him, if you like. If you make your sneak roll, go to 65. If you fail your sneak roll, go to 62.

If you do not care about sneaking up on him, but just want to get there as soon as possible, go to 50.

60 The nomad dies with a horrible wail.

You notice your stead has been looted and some blood is inside your stead that did not come from your recent combat...is Myella safe?!?

Go to 63.

61 You are tantalizingly close to the foliage before the nomads let out a whoop. You have been spotted!

Go to 55.

62 As you approach, the nomad suddenly emerges from your stead with his broadsword and shield ready for combat. He has just cast Protection 1 on himself. His only means of escape is through you. Go to 49.

63 You hear a group of mounted people moving towards your stead. You may attempt to escape towards the river, or try to take them on.

Go to 53 to escape.

Go to 56 to take them on.

64 You die on this frontier and you never discover the fate of your wife. The end.

65 You have five rounds to cast spells and ready weapons, then you will be at your stead where the nomad is. Remember, you have seen 16 other mounted nomads in the region. Go to 36.

